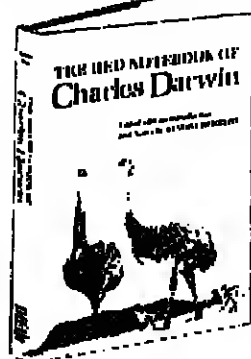


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THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

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At the carnival of language

By George Steiner

M. M. BAKHTIN:

The Dialogic Imagination

Four Essays

Edited by Michael Holquist

Translated by Caryl Emerson and

Michael Holquist

44pp. University of Texas Press. \$25.

h 292 71527 7

which characterize the history of Bakhtin's works, hinge to mind Walter Benjamin.

The glossary provided at the close of this compendium of four essays is indispensable. Each individual, affirms Bakhtin, inhabits his own language-world and conceptual-semantic system.

This in-dwelling signifies that every human individual is also an "otherness", *une autre* (*the other*) to every other human being. The perpetual compulsion and irreducible difficulties of dialogue, of reciprocal understanding, stem immediately from this monadic condition (the affinities with Leibniz are unmistakable). We lodge within a "chronotope", a "time-space" which not only determines the forces at work in our culture, and the horizons and perspectives of perception and recognition whereby we organize our conscious existence, but gives to every speech act its singular historicity, determining the possible resonances and oscillations of meaning within certain bounds of time and place. Here Bakhtin is close to Wittgenstein's postulate that a particular "mythology" animates every distinct language and every historical phase in a language.

In turn, these axioms of "otherness" and of "chronotopy" underlie Bakhtin's central term: "heteroglossia" (*raznoverchiye*, *raznoverchiye*). Social, historical, physiological, even meteorological conditions ensure that any work spoken (written) in any given time and place will have meaning(s) different, to a greater or lesser degree, from the meaning(s) it would have if and when spoken in any other psychical context and tongue. The "heteroglossia" of all human utterances entails that the interpreter of a text who, inevitably, operates under conditions other than those of the original enunciation, can never fully recapture, can never fully analyse, the original code, the "meaning of meaning", in any semantic moment. He can never, for instance, fully assess the decisive interplay (dialectic) between what Bakhtin identifies as the centrifugal and the centripetal agencies in any language and culture, ie, the interplay between rules and conventions on the one hand, and the innovative, "idiomatic", subversive, anarchic uses of the language by an individual. "Heteroglossia", a concept even more radical than the Sapir-Whorf model of irreducibly autonomous "language-

worlds", makes impossible any strict delimitation between *langue* and *parole* as Saussure defines them. It denies the erosive and abstractive universalism of current transformational generative speech models. Bakhtin stands massively with Blake's "holiness of the minute particular".

In a psychic and social reality dominated by "heteroglossia", *hyiprobolun del purhute* (cf. the Italian version of Bakhtin's previously untranslated notes for 1970-71 in *Interszezioni*, 1.1.1981), the primary epistemological and executive mode is *dialogizui*. Every oral pronouncement, every written text, is part of an ambient whole. There presses upon it the aggregate of other potential meanings, idioms, social and cultural forces, even of other languages. Bakhtin's notion here is very much that of the astrophysicist when the latter tells us that there is a strict sense in which the lives and motions of any particle in the universe are subject to the gravitational pull of all other matter. Another way of putting it (as I have sought to show in *After Babel*), is that no formally complete or mechanical translation is ever possible precisely because the relevant context and zone of intertextuality is, potentially, infinite. To "dialogize", to speak, to write, to read "dialogically", teaches Bakhtin, is to apprehend the relative, the open-ended nature of all semantic phenomena. It is to realize that, with Rabelaisian cunning and exuberance, men and women, social classes, professions, age groups, localities, will use the very "same" words in the language to mean very different things. Bakhtin's *slav* emphasizes both the individuality of a word and the "dialogic" quality of its uses by an individual. "Polyglossia", the co-existence of two or more national languages in such societies as ancient Rome or modern Finland is, for Bakhtin, merely a salient instance of the existential pluralities within any single tongue. And it is just this plurality which makes speech *vysskazyvaniye* - a living dialectical synthesis between individual consciousness and external, social determinants: between psychic uniqueness and communal generality.

These categories and definitions underwrite Bakhtin's masterpiece, his study of the carnival of language and of the language of carnival in Rabelais. Never has there been a style more "heteroglossic" than Rabelais's, more

currently grounded, both in the human body and in the actualities of a teaming social milieu. Never has individual parlance been subject to more liberally observed and transmitted pressures, those of the carnival linguistic context which is our own flesh. Thus every instant of the Gargantua-Pantagruel language-feast is "dialogic". An anarchic profusion of neologisms, the jargons of different social classes, at different levels, put to ludicrous rout the "monologic" pretensions of the high style of classical rhetoric. They make a mockery of maudlin prescription and academic norms of "correctness". In Bakhtin's Rabelais, even more than in his beloved Aristophanes, grammar becomes laughter in action. And laughter is, finally, the supreme truth and the supreme custodian of human freedom.

This is the crux of Bakhtin's entire aesthetics. Only laughter can attain "national universality". It alone can unify culture and community, because it is accessible to all. In an acute aphorism, set down towards the close of his life, Bakhtin defines laughter as "the realm of ends (the means, on the contrary, are always serious)". Only where laughter reigns, can the barriers of monadic apartness which separate human speakers be breached. Through this breach pours "festive culture" and the communion of carnival. It is via laughter and carnival that we can "make the world speak and give ear to its speech". In his 1970-71 notes, Bakhtin rightly ascribes this key trope to Heidegger. When, one wonders, did he come across Heidegger's ontological linguistics? How much of the relevant material was available to Bakhtin?

The Dostoevsky study is less of a whole. Here, Bakhtin is concerned primarily with two concepts: that of "polyphony" and that of "stereofication". He sees in Dostoevsky's career and in his novels a striking case of the writer as "many-voiced". Dostoevsky's register comprises the modes of the journalist, of the melodramatist, of the autobiographer, of the philosopher, of the theologian, of the polemic publicist, of the public orator and, at times, of a labyrinthine allegorist who knows how to converse in language between inner and outer discourse in the individual, between the grammars of different historical epochs and ideologies, which compose the mosaic of our actual world. Only the novel can "organize into

irony to yellow journalism. For their part, the novels enact the dynamics of manifold styles or "stratification". Each character must seek a linguistic level or "stratum" appropriate to his or her psychic needs, to his or her - characteristically Dostoevskian - search for inward coherence and expressive identity. Entrapped in cliché or official idiom, in bourgeois banality or "poetic" eloquence, a human being literally loses itself. The spirit comes home to its place of true being (again an arch-Heideggerian notion) only when it hammers out its integral voice. In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov is hunted through successive and spurious speech-worlds - "Napoleonic", "positivist-scientific", "legalistic" and only rhetorically introspective - before he attains the stratum of liturgical yet also literal directness which restores him to himself and to the community of forgiveness.

Two four essays in *The Dialogic Imagination* expound and elaborate Bakhtin's nomenclature and theoretical model with reference to prose fiction as a whole. They preclude the view that the novel is the supreme literary and epistemological genre, that in the novel all previous major genres, the epic in particular, find their natural fulfilment. Only in the novel can the inherently "heteroglossic" and "dialogic" genius of natural language be freely deployed. Only here can various types of "dominant discourse", this is to say of emic rhetoric now sclerotic and oppressive, be undermined and, at last, swept away (though *Literature and Revolution* plunges for drama as the form of the radical future, there are distinct points of contact between Trotsky's and Bakhtin's critiques of past rhetorical elevations).

To experience language and the world in free, creative interplay is, for Bakhtin, to do so "novelistically". It is the prose novel - Bakhtin's formulation is striking - which makes of human discourse "a working hypothesis for comprehending and expressing reality". The traditional stylistics of the lyric-epic-tragic past had no means of handling the "dialogic" encounters between speech-levels, between diverse languages, between inner and outer discourse in the individual, between the grammars of different historical epochs and ideologies, which compose the mosaic of our actual world. Only the novel can "organize into

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

artistic unity" the creative manifold of labels. In tragic drama and the formulaic epic, words are frozen in hietatic place by "monologic" criteria of propriety and exclusion. But meaning, put words, for modern man assuredly, are "born in dialogue as a living reponder within it; the word is shown in dialogue interaction with an alien word that is already to the object". This birth, this coming to dialectical life, is best seen in the novel, with its "dialogic" and "stratified" fabric. And where the narrative design is strong enough, where it is open to self-parody and the feasts of laughter, the "heteroglossia", the "polyphony" of human consciousness and utterance are given the cohesion of living forms, of the life-process itself (Bakhtin knew his Bergson).

Bakhtin was a master comparatist, in Auerbach's sense, in that of Curtius and Gianfranco Contini. He draws on ancient grammarians and rhetoricians (Varro is a favourite). He is at home in Hellenistic romances, medieval *fabliaux*, the novels of the *Enfance* and the Enlightenment. He proceeds at a stroke from Ion of Chios and Macrobius to Herder, Pushkin and Eugene Sue. Ponderous, repetitive, often abstract as these essays are, laboured as we may find concepts such as "chronotopy", "heteroglossia" and "stratification" to be, Bakhtin's zestful wealth of allusion gives to many a passage something of his multicoloured, carnevalesque aura which he looks for in great literature.

But although the range of reference is exhilarating, there are drastic lacunae, particularly in respect of exactly those twentieth-century masters of fiction who would be decisive to Bakhtin's arguments. There are, in this thick tome, no references whatever to either Joyce or Kafka. There are two perfunctory mentions of Thomas Mann, there is one single allusion to Proust. It is, naturally, difficult to guess whether these omissions are the simple result of Soviet circumstance, of the fact that the writings of Joyce and of Kafka were obtainable, if at all, only in clandestine guise and obviously unmentionable. The case of Mann is more puzzling: much of Bakhtin's work on the relations between the epic and the novel is concerned in implicit challenge to Lukács, and in Lukács, Thomas Mann's presence is pervasive. But whatever the reasons, the resulting imbalance, especially where Bakhtin is dealing with time in the novel, is damaging.

Moreover, (and this crucial point goes unnoticed in Michael Holquist's largely uncritical introduction), Bakhtin's sense of "the prose novel" is, at all points, highly selective. What he means by "the novel" is, essentially, and repetitively, the remnants of Hellenistic romance, philosophic satire such as Lucian's and the works of Rabelais, Cervantes, Grimmelshausen, Sterne, Jean-Paul and Gogol. Dostoevsky serves, as we have seen, primarily as exemplar of the "polyphonic". In these essays, Balzac, Flaubert, George Eliot are present only marginally, where at all. The "great Russian novel" is Eugene Oenegin, Aristophanes, the author of *Morges*, the Menippean satirists are, by need and courtesy of Bakhtin's case, pre-novellists.

Concomitantly, many of his judgments on men and on texts outside the "heteroglossic" and satirical canon are often bizarre. What justifies the designation of Ibsen's dramas as "novelized"? To assert that Calvin's language "was an intentional and conscious lowering of, almost a travesty on, the sacred language of the Bible," comes pretty close to talking nonsense. It is patently untrue that "poetic style is by convention suspended from any mutual interaction with alien discourse, any allusion to alien discourse". Unlike Mandelstam, it would seem that Bakhtin had understood little of Dante.

But this last point leads to the heart of the trouble. When Bakhtin declares, as he does in these four papers, that only prose fiction can deal with the dynamic, many-voiced, self-subverting, always open-ended flux of life, when he declares that a phenomenon such as "Bovaryism" — the obsessive identification of our own lives with those of fictive personae — is made possible only by the "modern" (i.e. post-Renaissance) novel, he is leaving out the world of drama, of Shakespeare above all. There is hardly

an aspect of "heteroglossia", of "stratification", of "dialogic" spontaneity, of paradoxical plurality, which is not magnificently present in, say, the two Parts of *Henry IV*. The provocative intrusion of visceral, below-the-surface speech into sublimity is at least as old as Aeschylus' *Libation Bearers* and Euripides' *Electra*. There is no more morally open-ended, no more intellectually questioning and self-questioning a form, than Greek tragic drama. And long before Madaon Bovary, generations identified with Hamlet.

Now Bakhtin was far too acute not to know all this. Thus it seems plausible that the somewhat monolithic and arbitrary tenor of argument exhibited in these four essays is not representative of the subtlety and inventiveness of his thought. The emphasis on the utter primacy of prose fiction, on its unique epistemological merits, as set out here and as made even more emphatic by Professor Holquist's commentary, may well be misleading. It could stand for one of Bakhtin's several voices or "masks".

Marxist literary criticism, the epistemology of Marxist aesthetes, have, since the time of Marx, Engels, Plekhanov and the young Lukács, drawn mainly on prose fiction. It is in the domain of the novel — Eugene Oenegin being, typologically, considered as such — that Russian and Soviet literary theory and practical criticism have played their strongest suit. Once Formalist poetics had been bounded from native ground, the theory of literature, so far as it was allowed in the Stalinist and post-Stalinist dispensations, was, largely, that of the novel. In exalting the polyphonic, irreverent, populist genius of Gargantua, of Uncle Toby, of Sancho Panza and Simplicissimus, Bakhtin was staying, outwardly, within the rules of the Soviet game. But he was, of course, going much deeper. He was celebrating the very freedoms denied to man in the Soviet Union. "Heteroglossia", "polyphony", the rejection of the "monologic" and "frozen" in human discourse — these are audaciously Aesopian terms of rebellion against the conditions of Bakhtin's existence and of a totalitarian community.

Thus the study, the seeming exaltation of the novel, are weapons in the more or less masked struggle which Bakhtin's sensibility and scholarship sustained against the state. He could not have endured, one suspects, had he tried to fight his battles on the exposed ground of a theory of lyric poetry or of drama. As in all important writing out of the Soviet ice-age, we must learn to read between the lines even where (especially where) Bakhtin's propositions seem most dogmatic. His arsenal was richer than that displayed in these four essays. Listened to closely, the "dialogic imagination" will exclude neither Shakespeare nor Molière.

A third edition (and the first in paperback) of Victor Erlich's valuable and important study of *Russian Formalism, History — Doctrine* has just been published (311pp, Yale University Press, £5.65, 0 300 02635 8). Professor Erlich has written a new preface to this edition, but has not updated the text nor the bibliography.

Passing

At seventy, my father's life
Instructs me: one lung
Gone, the other — less than itself —
Still gasps with asthma.
There is no end to the end

Which goes on. It is
My own slow death. Like him
I vanish while my two sons
Hug me here, not understanding
Why they do, until

There is nothing between us —
Only, in photographs,
My living arms around them
As I slip invisibly
From their.

John Mole



"Le Tennis", an 1890 wood engraving by Lucien Pissarro. The original block is among those now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. A limited edition of 175 copies has been made from twenty-five of these blocks by John Bain and David Chmehers, working on an Albion hand press of the sort the Pissarro used. The portfolio is available at £160 plus VAT from the Anthony d'Offroy Gallery, 9 Dering Street, New Bond Street, London W1, and comes with a forty-seven page catalogue by David Chambers. This narrative book, fully illustrated with all the blocks in the portfolio and a number of the original drawings, can be purchased separately for £3 plus 75p post and package, either from Anthony d'Offroy or from the Publications Department, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

The intuitive side

By Peter Lomas

LOUIS BREGER:
Freud's Unfinished Journey
Conventional and Critical Perspectives
in Psychoanalytic Theory
145pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
£8.50.
0 7100 0613 6

It is by means of the intellect that we have tried to come to grips with human experience. That is to say, we have relied, following Bacon and Descartes, on cognition, abstraction and the principles which inform modern science in our public statements on the nature of man. To private we rely more on intuition. Our first experience of life — that which forms the core of our being — comes, if we are fortunate, from the intuitions of a mother. This discrepancy between the public and private attitude towards experience is acutely revealed in our understanding and treatment of the disturbed in mind. Whereas we usually respond to a distressed and perplexed person intuitively in private, our approach changes to a "scientific" one as soon as his or her disturbance is publicly identified.

At the end of the last century, when the intuitive approach to the mentally ill was at its lowest ebb, Freud, trained in the medical-scientific tradition, emerged with a new formula. Insofar as it was a formula, expressed in as

scientific a language as he could muster, he stood firmly with the traditional adherence to objectivity. To this extent he was a conservative. But his actual mode of approach to those in trouble, and the findings which resulted from this approach, were radically opposed to the form in which he strained to state them.

In *Freud's Unfinished Journey* Louis Breger, an American psychologist and psychoanalyst, describes the ways in which this central dilemma pervades Freud's work and is never resolved. Breger contrasts Freud's "masculine" ideal of order, discipline, work, science, and the conquest of nature with the "feminine" receptivity of his practice with patients, the recognition of the child's need for love and care, and his awareness of the disastrous consequences of a divisive rather than holistic world-view. Only late in life, in *Civilization and its Discontents* did Freud come near to reconciling the philosophical and social implications of his discoveries.

That Freud was in some ways a man of his time, steeped in male prejudice, couching his insights in an inappropriate and unworthy framework, is hardly fresh news. Many writers have made the same point, though few can have made it with the economy and lucidity of this book. What, however, is particularly rewarding in Breger's treatment of this issue is his reworking of Freud's case-histories in the light of his critique, thereby showing the degree to which the conflict permeates Freud's notions of psychopathology. Breger gives most space to the famous case of Schreber, and I shall do the same.

Schreber was a prominent German judge who, at the age of fifty-one, suffered a severe psychosis and entered a mental hospital under the care of a Dr Flechsig. After his discharge he wrote his "Memoirs of my Mental Illness" in an effort to convey what he believed to be an important insight. In his book Schreber describes how he came to believe that he was subjected to the most terrible persecutions, firstly by Flechsig and then by God, whose rays penetrated his body causing intense pain and restriction. He became unable to walk, eat, sleep or perform any action freely. If, however, he could be transformed into a woman, then, he believed, God's rays would bring pleasure and the world would be set back in its proper place.

Freud was the first to subject this extraordinarily rich document to analysis. In his view Schreber transferred homosexual wishes which he had unconsciously directed towards his father onto Flechsig and God. These impulses were now in the open and they terrified him and were totally

The malaise of modernity

By David Gascoyne

C. A. HACKETT:
Rimbaud
A Critical Introduction
167pp. Cambridge University Press.
£17.50 (paperback, £5.95).
0 521 22976 6

C. A. Hackett's "Critical Introduction" to Rimbaud, the most radically innovative of nineteenth-century French poets, is a judiciously condensed and balanced monograph free of academic aridity and conveying an invigorating feeling of enthusiasm.

Professor Hackett's text itself runs to only 131 pages, being followed by very adequate translations, by the author, of the numerous, often full-length, quotations from Rimbaud's *oeuvre* that are embedded in the exposition, and by a meticulously composed Chronological Table showing the years and dates of Rimbaud's epoch, life and works, with alongside them a list of the historical and literary events that marked each of these years. Such tables can be valuable, being often full of surprises and suggestions, and the present instance is in this respect, for me, no exception; it reinforces, in fact, my belief in the fundamental credibility of the Jungian concept of "synchronicity". In the third chapter of the book, for instance, attention is directed to the fact that in 1870, a year before Rimbaud wrote his manifesto-like so-called "Lettre du Voyant", Isidore Ducasse, alias the Comte de Lautréamont, published his misleadingly entitled *Les poésies*, generally presumed to have been intended to serve as preface to a collection of poems that were never written, which also might well be described as having something of the character of a manifesto. Although Lautréamont, eight years older than his even more precocious contemporary, cannot possibly have had any inkling of Rimbaud's existence, how fervently, having himself announced that at that time "des frissons nouveaux parcourent l'atmosphère intellectuelle", he would have found himself concurring with Rimbaud's assertion that: "il faut être absolument moderne".

The Chronological Table is followed by a couple of pages of Select Bibliography, which strike me as being a little meagre. Most of the standard, currently available editions of Rimbaud's work are listed, though one of the most recent and probably least expensive, the *Poésies*, also containing *Derniers vers*, *Une saison en enfer* and *Illuminations*, most capably edited and introduced by Daniel Leuwers, to be found in the popular *Le Livre de Poche* series, is not among them. Although it must be most rare and difficult to find

nowadays, Edgell Rickword's study of Rimbaud surely merits a mention also. On the other hand, I am grateful to Professor Hackett for the information, to be found in his Chronological Table, that it was apparently George Moore who first brought the name of Rimbaud before a public of English readers, and in the same year as that of the poet's ghastly death in Marseilles (1891) at that, in an essay on "Two Unknown Poets" (the other being Laforgue) in his *Impressions and Opinions*.

As one who read Benjamin Fondane's *Rimbaud le Voyant* about a year after its first appearance (1933) with the exhilarating feeling of having for the first time discovered an author who had seen Rimbaud vividly in just such a light as that towards which I was myself then groping, I am unable to resist expressing pleasure in finding the writer of this new English Introduction to the subject of my chief obsession of those years quoting from Fondane with tacit approval, even though Editions Plasma's 1979 republication of the book (containing five hitherto unpublished short chapters) does not find a place in his Bibliography. This is, however, perfectly understandable, as Fondane's study, though it may be considered to have stated the whole Rimbaud "case" in fundamentally radical and hence disturbingly metaphorical terms, expresses an extremely individual point of view, and as such might well be found by many to be too polemical.

Perhaps the most admirable quality of Fondane's philosophico-critical writings in general is the rare, disciplined passion with which they are informed; whereas Professor Hackett has quite clearly made a considerable effort to treat his theme here as dispassionately as possible, he emerges as a Rimbaudian who has noticeably reacted against what appears to regard, and not without justification, as the exaggerated *seer* aspect of the poet's writings that in France was for many years invariably associated with Rimbaud's name. I suspect that he associates this type of exaggeration above all with the Surrealists, though it was in fact a group of "dissident" one-time Surrealists, notably Roland de Réneville and R. Gilbert-Lecomte, co-founders with René Daumal of the review *Le Grand Jeu*, that contained the principal spokesmen of what might be described as the "Rimbaud le Voyant" cult. In the first *Manifeste Surrealiste* (1924), André Breton restricted himself to stating that "Rimbaud est surréaliste dans la vie et nullement".

It is here that we touch on the crux of any possible debate concerning Rimbaud's basic significance today, more than a century since his final "literary" words were penned: the inseparability of the extraordinarily haunting though

brief and seemingly abandoned work from the unique personality of its author and his dramatic and indeed tormented life. The famous, ever-renewed conflict between two schools of criticism — the one which believes that a poet's or novelist's work should only be judged with supposedly absolute objectivity on its own distinctive merits or flaws, without allowing the intrusion of any evidence other than the minimum of stark biographical fact, and the other, which regards the artist's written work as but one manifestation in an entire existential continuum — here makes an unavoidable intrusion. In presenting these two overtly irreconcilable types of critical approach in such terms, I have no doubt betrayed on which side my own sympathy lies; yet it is to Professor Hackett's credit that he shows no obvious signs of favouring one of these approaches as opposed to the other — indeed, if anything the tinge of asperity in his brief reference to the type of analysis long favoured by the group of critics associated until quite recently with *Tel Quel* and structuralism (personally I would not include Michel Butor in any such overall derogation), gives one ground for supposing him rather to favour the biographically illuminated autopsy.

Despite this, however, the greater part of *Rimbaud: A Critical Introduction* is devoted to exegesis and a lucidly unadorned scrutiny of Rimbaud's most significant writings. Among his glosses to the poems of *Illuminations* (whether or not Rimbaud ever intended the definite article to precede the title of this collection is debatable, since he had no responsibility for its compilation or publication), Professor Hackett is surely right in singling out "Génie" as representing one of the finest examples of what he regards as Rimbaud's special gift, his "art of persuasion", which is "not concerned to convince us of the existence or importance of something real; but to persuade himself and the reader that the non-existent does exist and to create the illusion of its real presence." This would seem to be debatable at least on ontological grounds, but it would be difficult to quarrel with the statement that in "Génie" Rimbaud, "in a continually modulating and flawless rhetorical sweep . . . brings together the facts that have occurred separately in other *Illuminations*, such as 'Vies', 'Angoisse', 'Solitude' (the obverse and cynical counterpart of 'Génie'), 'Jeunesse (Sonnet)' and, in particular 'Une saison'. The judgment with which the chapter specially devoted to *Illuminations* concludes is concise and unexceptionable: "The *Illuminations* are (Rimbaud's) greatest achievements and they are the climax of a poetic and human drama to which *Une saison en enfer* is the dénouement." The peroration that winds up the

next chapter, concerning the work in which this dénouement found its expression, is unexceptionable principally in the sense that it is surely accurate, but to me it seems to lack just that degree of emphasis that could have made what it says a more satisfactory comment on Rimbaud's disillusioned valediction to literary self-expression, to his attempts to make language the vehicle of an exceptional vision and to all the prevailing criteria of the nineteenth century. In his journey of self-discovery, Professor Hackett tells us, "Rimbaud has touched on, and thus bare, most of the conflicts, ambivalent emotions, and dualisms that exist in Western man. Now, at a distance of more than a century, we can see that, at one level *Une saison en enfer* expresses the crisis in the life of an adolescent struggling for self-fulfilment in the year 1873, at another level it represents a crisis in our own materialistic civilization."

When considered in the integral context of his life — including the persistently enigmatic vicissitudes of the existence on which he embarked, ceasing to write anything but inexpressive family and business letters and geographical reports, at the age of nineteen, together with his huffily hermetic, at first sight far from sympathetic character and the few limited, unsatisfactory yet significant relationships that intermittently alleviated his essential solitude — Rimbaud appears as one of the most typical exemplars of the malaise most symptomatic of the ever more disruptive crisis of the modern world and its whole civilization. It is fairly obvious that our own universal "season in hell" has come. Heidegger, lecturing on "The Thing" in 1930, spoke of exactly what was happening now: "Man stares at what the explosion of the atom bomb could bring with it. He does not see that the atom bomb and its explosion are the mere final emission

of what has long since taken place, has already happened. Not to mention the single hydrogen bomb, whose triggering, though through to its utmost potential, might be enough to stuff out all life on earth."

Here, no doubt, it will be asked what these seemingly irrelevant, scaremongering quotations can have to do with the study of Arthur Rimbaud. I have introduced them because, despite my earlier remarks regarding the tendency to exaggerate the importance of the "Lettre du Voyant" as a document outlining the one true future path of modern poetry, these were not meant to imply that I fail to recognize, through Rimbaud's later writings, continual, obviously authentic flashes of prophetic inspiration. And it was because he experienced so disturbing a premonition of the sort of misanthropic and demonic dumbness of which Martin Buber has written that he became incapable of pursuing his youthful campaign on behalf of *voynance* and the conquest of the irrational; while the kind of dissociation of the personality that led him to declare "Je suis un autre" can be seen as closely related to the ethically bankrupt detachment that causes us to "stare" impatiently at the bomb and the present nuclear arms-race.

A final quotation from Rimbaud himself, though it is scarcely reassuring, may serve to justify the way I have ended a review of an unconformist book about the poet. It is not its flawless rhetoric which makes it remarkable; and it comes from the end of the prose-poem in *Illuminations* entitled "Démocratie":

"Au revoir toi, n'importe où. Conscients du bon vouloir, nous aurons la philosophie (sacro: ignominie pour la science, roue, pour le confort; la crevasse pour le monde qui va. C'est la vraie marche. En avant, route!"

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The Hornet

October brought the last one of the year
And laid it sleeping on your window-frame.
It stood for winter, and the falling games,
The end of something, and death coming near.

Drowned in a jug, with cardboard sild across
To keep it uoder, it sleeps always now,
Its warrior's head bent sideways, like a bow
Made to an enemy, for the mortal loss.

I see its body, simple as a cone
Of pine or Douglas fir, cypress or spruce.
It has no meaning, scarcely any use
Except to make more precious all we own.

The last of life, and living in this place,
Year in, year out, with what we have and hold,
Great barns, and trees, and somewhere to grow cold
And die in, when the time comes, with some grace

In folded honour, free from bitterness
Or rancour, and not losing elegance
At the last, as this dead hornet's final chance:
Left it a scoop of terror. That, O yes.

George MacBeth

Amy and the apes

By Thomas A. Sebeok

MICHAEL CRICHTON:
Congo
344pp. Allen Lane. £6.95.
0 7139 1416 5

Rewrite King Solomon's Mines, the famous "faithful but unpretending record of a remarkable adventure" dedicated "to all the big and little boys who read it", mix in some modern ingredients - hocus-poies computer gadgetry; Amy, a counterfeit gorilla that habitually uses sign language, yet "understands most human speech" and "can tell when you're lying and she doesn't like it"; and a mutant gorilla species, as lethal as it is biologically unlikely, a troop of "attack animals, trained for cunning and viciousness" and you get a commercially viable screenplay (the movie rights were, in fact, sold before Michael Crichton wrote the first word of *Congo*), if hardly more than a pastime novel. In brief, *Congo* is a machine-tooled adventure story, east in the lurid spirit and manner of Rider Haggard.

The principal characters are a cardboard trio of human protagonists, pitted against the murderous band of gorillas, and the mediating "hillingual" climer, Amy. These figures are programmed to shove the plot forward, in conflict with a host of human, animal, and other obstacles, at rapid pace; but the story is of a depressing dotiness characteristic, alas, of the kind of science-fiction which is centred on

There is nothing more significant at stake in this piece of fiction than the doctrine of verisimilitude: Aristotle's concept of *to eikos*, and the closely related notion of the imitation of nature. Following Chapter Nine of the *Poetics*, it is Crichton's business not "to tell what happened but the kind of things that would happen". The imposable is allowable, so long as it is verisimilitudinous; the implausible is possible, since (as Aristotle says in Chapter Twenty-Five) it is probable that some improbable actions will occur. Crichton is licensed to offend against what is known to be known, if, and only if, there is some overriding artistic reason for him to do so. Ursula K. Le Guin laid down a pertinent principle of science fiction in ruling that the writer "must not flout the evidence of science...". In some quarters, this is known as the "automate translation" gimmick: if you have to communicate with aliens - or animals - in a hurry, use the Universal Translator, an ad hoc magic coding machine. Amy incarnates one variant of this over-used device.

Crichton has obviously conducted some research into communication, both animal and electronic. He appends four pages of authentic references on these subjects, as well as on aspects of West African ethnology, to say nothing of such arcane matters as side-looking airborne radar. But it is not clear whether he can evaluate objectively what he claims to have read, and he has not read nearly enough. True, A. F. Dixon's *The Natural History of the Gorilla* appeared too late for him to take into account, but he either misunderstood or preferred to suppress the conclusions in Herbert S. Terrace's works, some of which he does cite, and has completely ignored the by now voluminous end devastatingly critical literature showing that loose talk about ape-talk is based at once on naïve theoretical preconceptions and pathetically poor experimental procedures, the results of which were very largely perpetuated in distorted form and so massaged into the popular consciousness by dint of media hype.

It is not often that a thriller, such as this, gets reviewed in the austere pages of *The Wall Street Journal*, but Raymond Sokolov went to that trouble in this year's January 14 issue, under the title, "Separating Fact from Fiction". Mr Sokolov was indignant because Crichton "blatantly falsified a basic fact: knowing that he does so", and thereby "shows contempt for the public and for his own work. He cheats at his own game." Like Sokolov, I was upset by having caught Crichton out as

either a sloppy researcher or a perverse provocateur: once he lets you down on so crucial a figure as Amy, on whose linguistic skill the basic plot hinges, how can you trust his veracity about the rest of the scientific and technological minutiae which he heaps on and on, page after page? These details, in the aggregate, should add up to a convincing, comprehensive view of his imagining world, but, for me, the magic was dispelled with the early introduction of Amy: not because she is impossible - although that she is all right - but because she is so plainly a phony.

What, then, are Amy's functions in this book? She accompanies an American expedition back to Africa - where she was born, although she was linguistically trained (where else?) in the California Bay Area - in search of a diamond mine (the McGuffin) in the lost city of Zinj (which Haggard fans will promptly recognize as the Place of Death). Control of the mine will alter the future of warfare. The killer apes that guard the diamonds of Zinj must be got in touch with. Amy serves as a convenient intermediary. She is also one of two heroines in the book. The other, Dr Karen Ross, is a "genuine mathematical prodigy", "logical to a fault", young and attractive, but glacial and unhelpful. Amy indicates on first meeting Karen "No like woman no like Amy no like go away away." Amy has "many distinctly 'feminine' traits" -

Sooner or later

By R. J. Hollingdale

KARL KROLOW:
Im Gehen
87pp. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.
3 518 03470 7
PETER HANDKE:
Kindergeschichte
137pp. Suhrkamp.
3 518 03016 7

Im Gehen is a record of the last, uneventful years of an old man, appropriately named Späth. He goes for walks in the vicinity of his home, and as time has gone on the area bounded by his route has grown smaller and smaller. He notices things, remembers things, registers items of news from the world outside; at last, simultaneously tired of it all and informed with a feeling of freedom ("wie sie gewöhnlich für Entschlossene charakteristisch ist"), he breaks out of this cycle and walks out of life.

Karl Krolow's style is that of an impressionist poet and it conveys very well the ever narrowing range of the "impressions", present and remembered, of which Späth is still aware. The things that engage his attention are on the whole natural - colours, smells, the weather, music, his own sexuality, the woman who loved him; or lurid - the release of mediation when a Russian satellite crashed, the Guyanese mass suicide, American murder statistics.

Kindergeschichte is an account of a young man's life with his daughter from her birth until she is eleven years old. The girl's mother, from whom the man is separated, plays only a small role and what little you are told about her makes her seem almost completely unsympathetic: when you have noticed this, though, you also notice that you are told very little about the girl, either, by comparison with what you are told about the man. The "story" is the child's. None of the people in the story is given a name; the man is usually "der Erwachsene", the woman "die Frau", the daughter "das Kind".

Peter Handke writes rather like someone keeping a diary to whom the events of each day are, when he records them, of equivalent value; and his style is often serpentine (eg. the sentence beginning on page 95, with "Das Haus war klein" and ending 189 words later with "von einem Gefilde mischt").

she is coy, responds to flattery, is preoccupied by her appearance, loves make-up, and is fussy about the colour of the sweaters she wears in the winter; above all, she prefers men to women. The relationship of the two females continues to be tense, but the antagonism becomes strangely muted as the journey progresses into the heart of darkness. At the conclusion of *Congo*, Karen joins the US Geological Survey, Amy joins a Zaire gorilla troop (regulation, not outlaw), and the romance ends with her bearing an offspring whom she appears to be busy teaching sign language in the jungle.

A story-teller may, as Aristotle pronounced, depart from the representation of reality (if among other considerations) he follows "common opinion". In our society, common opinion tends to be moulded by the media, to which Crichton is closely attuned. According to the media, some apes - as well as dogs, dolphins, myxine eels - can be transubstantiated from the base metal of which speechless creatures are thought to be composed into the golden endowment which language capacity alone is widely believed to vouchsafe. In the authentic world of science, as opposed to alchemy, no such transmutation has ever taken place, contrary to what you imagine you have learned from doctored films shown on TV, or read in magazines such as *Penthouse* (see the

November 1980 issue, showing Koko in the nude), or heard indirectly from a credulous neighbour.

Consequently, a literary form has come into being, stemming from an ancient tradition which conjures up talking animals as props in order to actualize the author's narrative intent. Harvey, Mary Coyle Chase's six-foot pooka rabbit, interacted verbally with, and thus delineated the character of, only one figure in the play so called (1944), but remained inaudible to the rest of the cast and, of course, to the beguiled audience. The genre I have in mind took a decisive turn towards science-fiction, beginning perhaps with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, whose endearing monster rediscovered the endless delights of semiotics: "I found that these people [in the shepherd's cottage] possessed a method of communicating their experience and feelings to one another by articulate sounds. I perceived that the words they spoke sometimes produced pleasure or pain, from the tones of the voice, and the smiles or sadness, in the minds and countenances of the hearers. This was indeed a godlike science, and I ardently desired to become acquainted with it."

Possession of this godlike science is typically imputed to whatever species of animal is currently the focus of public attention. Thus, throughout the 1960s, porpoises held the centre of the stage, as in Robert Merle's astutely

framed *The Day of the Dolphin* (1967, later Hillywood ground the dolphin into a dog). In the 1970s, into the present decade, and who knows how far into the rest of the century, the chosen species has become African Great Apes. Peter Dickinson's elegant detective story, *The Porcupine Oracle*, appearing in 1974, set a milestone in the development of chatty chimps, as did, in quite another mode and mood, T. Coraghessan Boyle's short story, "Descent of Man", at once foul and pulverizing.

The first major garrulous gorilla was a Uganda-born mule, devised by John Goulet, for his wondrously imagined and brilliantly executed *centum & elf*, *Oh's Profit* (1975); retitled *The Human Ape* for the paperback trade. Goulet's plot is at least as entertaining as Crichton's, but there are also issues of much consequence at stake, among them, human nature and the nature of language. The story of Oh is profound, moving: it grips while it instructs. Where Amy makes a mockery of authenticity, Oh is true to the essentiality of man. It is a pity that Crichton's gorilla is bound to prevail over Goulet's, and that most people will continue to credit the factitious over the real. As Oh decides midway through Goulet's underestimated novel, "from now on he would not willingly misuse language, lest it misuse him..."

And that is all: no reflections of any kind are inspired by this scene, no generalities are arrived at, there is no talk of "the everlasting spirit".

Kindergeschichte is an optimistic and idealistic book; its author believes that the world is the product of something behind it, which fact bestows on life a meaning it would otherwise not possess. *Im Gehen* is the precise opposite. In the absence of any conventional "story", it is these attitudes which really constitute their subject-matter.

It is not, I think, an accident of talent that Krolow produces so much more satisfactory an "artistic experience": Handke's explicit didacticism is at odds with the form he has chosen to exhibit it in. Krolow's attitude towards the world is implicit and, by accommodating himself to the limitations of the form, he makes the form work for him.

This pedestrian imagery, however, is spectacularly upstaged. A hideously mutilated corpse - the body of a local carpenter's son - is found hanging from the lightweight cross Rumsey has commissioned. Heavily plastered with raw reality, the decorously familiar icon takes on, as Leach suggests, a grimly new significance. And Rumsey's values have to alter to accommodate this. As mass-murder ravages the community, his Christianity succumbs to the onslaught of brutal experience. Belief in God is the first casualty: invited to preach in the local chapel, Rumsey - having seen the darkness - proclaims his new atheism with missionary zeal.

Set against the relentless heat of a Texas summer, *Blood Games* portrays life as hell. Abominations are unsimply piled up: murders are arbitrary; corpses dementedly disfigured. Compounding the violence, most of the victims are young, trusting, full of vitality. Attempts at order prove pitifully temporary: regression to barbarism is rife. The carpenter, for instance, initially an admirable character, decently proud of his skills, is soon reduced to hacking out a second, retaliatory cross - "It was stark and ugly, as if made by primitive man" - on which to torture the psychopath who killed his son.

Daubing his picture with the darkest possible shades, Christopher Leach makes his murderers not only horrendously damaging but horrendously damaged. One, his swollen face marked with "bruise-coloured shadows", is dying of cancer. Another, in fine physical condition, is mentally diseased. Together, savaging the healthy and well-adjusted, they are set up as macabre embodiments of the monstrous in-

jury life randomly deals out. By the end, *Blood Games* has heaped up twelve corpses and a welter of mortuary detail. And, in its overwhelming urge to show the world as terrifying, it adds to this already highly-coloured material a garish scattering of horror-film techniques. At moments of especial awfulness, the action freezes into some appalling picture. Gothic sound-effects keep the build-up sections tense; a car radiator gives a "small, shrill scream"; the uncanny cry of water-fowl kills the blood that will soon be spilt.

Though skilful at suspense, Leach is rather crude when it comes to characterization. Psychological subtlety is in short supply, and there is a hollowness about his efforts to inhabit personalities exposed to ex-

trauma. In a way this is almost a relief: you feel quite thankful that his characters never seem thoroughly alive since he makes them so thoroughly dead. Rumsey rhetorically asks his abashed congregation, in its final scene *Blood Games* hammers home this view with dangling irony. Pushing Rumsey to the periphery of the narrative, Leach abruptly switches to a hitherto minor character, a girl eager to escape small-town life for the bright lights. The novel's sarcastic closing tableau shows her, full of naïve optimism, racing off in a stolen car towards "a future she knew could only be clean and free and beautiful". Given Leach's grim world, it's to be hoped she doesn't stop to pick up any hitch-hikers.

The secret of unsucces

By Andrew Motion

WILLIAM BOYD:
On the Yankee Station
and Other Stories
184pp. Hamish Hamilton. £7.95.
0 241 10426 2

"If any one theme can be said to emerge from the stories in *On the Yankee Station* it is a concern with narrative in its varying guises and modes, approaches and methods." William Boyd's publishers are keen to make him hot property - not simply by bringing out this collection hard on the heels of his successful first novel, but by implying that he is an innovator: a post-modernist trouble-shooter. Boyd himself provides some justification for this enrolment into the avant-garde. His concluding story trickily exploits the methods by which life becomes art. Its speaker, William (Boyd? or who?), loses his girlfriend to an older brother and compensates for the actual loss in a fictional retaliation. He pushes - or does he? - his brother over a waterfall. Boyd encourages us to admire his playfulness: "You write fiction and what are you doing?" his nameless asks. "You're telling lies, pal, that's all." But as the book's other stories testify, it is very far from being all: neither is it true to say that Boyd's main concern is with the processes and resources of narrative. *On the Yankee Station* is a collection of eminently readable, entertaining and deeply traditional stories, in which the inclination to fabricate is not self-consciously or problematically investigated as a problem of the "novel", but granted to characters as a sign of emotional (or usually) sexual uncertainty.

"Hardly Ever", one of the most engaging stories, makes the point comically. A group of public school boys volunteer to sing in H.M.S. *Phafores*, not for any musical reason, but because it gives them a chance to meet girls from the local grammar school. Although pairings do quickly occur, one of the boys, Niles, is conspicuously less active in fact than he is in imagination. Every innocent meeting with the girl of his choice is subsequently embroidered and recast for the benefit of his dormitory companions.

"She was looking at me, as if to say... and we just sort of moved close together and kissed." There was a pause. "Get your tongue down?" "Jesus, filthy. One track bloody mind... Yeah, yeah, if you must know every detail. Not at first - the third or fourth kiss. But it got pretty passionate. Frenching just about all the time."

When Niles and his partner come to what is meant to be the crunch, after the last performance of *Phafores*, he humiliates himself by falling asleep beside her in the squash courts, but sets off back to the dormitory, intent on giving his listeners what they expect. His tale-telling is an explicit, active compensation for his own inept-

ness. Boyd's publishers are keen to make him hot property - not simply by bringing out this collection hard on the heels of his successful first novel, but by implying that he is an innovator: a post-modernist trouble-shooter. Boyd himself provides some justification for this enrolment into the avant-garde. His concluding story trickily exploits the methods by which life becomes art. Its speaker, William (Boyd? or who?), loses his girlfriend to an older brother and compensates for the actual loss in a fictional retaliation. He pushes - or does he? - his brother over a waterfall. Boyd encourages us to admire his playfulness: "You write fiction and what are you doing?" his nameless asks. "You're telling lies, pal, that's all." But as the book's other stories testify, it is very far from being all: neither is it true to say that Boyd's main concern is with the processes and resources of narrative. *On the Yankee Station* is a collection of eminently readable, entertaining and deeply traditional stories, in which the inclination to fabricate is not self-consciously or problematically investigated as a problem of the "novel", but granted to characters as a sign of emotional (or usually) sexual uncertainty.

And that is all: no reflections of any kind are inspired by this scene, no generalities are arrived at, there is no talk of "the everlasting spirit".

Das kleine Leben verliert zuweilen zwanglos vor seinen Augen. Er kam hinzu, wie mehrere spielende hatte, gab es gar nicht; auch 'die Endzeit' war nur ein Hirnspinnst: mit jedem neuen Bewusstsein begannen die immergleichen Möglichkeiten, und die Augen der Kinder im Gedächtnis - sich sie dir an! - überlebten den ewigen Geist. Wehe dir, der du diesen Blick verstümmst.

Handke uses the fictional form as a vehicle for philosophical reflections: this, more than anything else, is responsible for his lack of narrative tension. "Der Erwachsene" uses "das Kind" as a window through which he hopes to behold the "secret of the universe": this is why she has so few individualizing characteristics.

Späth, nearing the end of life, might have had more incentive to seek to crack the secret of the universe, but he does not do so:

Das kleine Leben verliert zuweilen zwanglos vor seinen Augen. Er kam hinzu, wie mehrere spielende hatte, gab es gar nicht; auch 'die Endzeit' war nur ein Hirnspinnst: mit jedem neuen Bewusstsein begannen die immergleichen Möglichkeiten, und die Augen der Kinder im Gedächtnis - sich sie dir an! - überlebten den ewigen Geist. Wehe dir, der du diesen Blick verstümmst.

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Keeping faith

By Charles R. Larson

CAMARA LAYE:
The Guardian of the Word
Translated by James Kirkup
223pp. Fontana. £1.35.
0 00615 946 X

Though Camara Laye was only fifty-two years old when he died in Senegal in February 1980, he was already regarded by many critics of African literature as the continent's major Francophone novelist. His autobiography, *The African Child* (*L'enfant noir*, 1954) eloquently described the rare Islamic/animistic heritage of his native Guinea that has nurtured him. His masterpiece, *The Radiance of the King* (*Le regard du roi*, 1956), had long been hailed as the great African novel. The publication of his third work, *A Dream of Africa* (*Rêve d'Afrique*, 1966) had resulted in his forced exile in Senegal because of the critical picture it presented of Sékou Touré's politics.

Laye's fourth and last work, *Le Maître de la Parole*, published in Paris the year before his death, has now been splendidly translated by James Kirkup and given the English title *The Guardian of the Word*. Unlike all of his earlier works, this volume is a kind of West African epic, chronicling the life

Battering the senses

By Peter Kemp

CHRISTOPHER LEACH:
Blood Games
227pp. Dent. £6.95.
0 460 04536 9

Blood Games is a book that tries to turn an atrocity into a microcosm. A lurid tale of butchery and vengeance, it regards itself as offering bleak truths about the human state. Straining to invest a horror story with the significance of a parable, it wrenches reality to the point of presenting extremity as life's norm.

The novel's plot concerns the hideous mayhem perpetrated by a trio of mass-murderers in Texas: its aim is to establish this as an allegory of man's condition. And a crucial part of this condition, it repeatedly insists, is that there is no God to extend help or impose justice. In this book, Christianity takes almost as much of a battering as some of the murder-victims. Brandishing the crucifixion of a carpenter's son as its grimmest narrative atrocity, *Blood Games* emphatically assails the religion with its own symbols. Plundering pious images, it uses them to illustrate a very different text. Flames and blood predominate, as is traditional. There is sermonizing talk of "fragile flesh that could so easily fall" and "the dark and evil soul of man". But the book's central article of faith is atheistic. The creed it preaches is that the Earth is "a fearful, ignorant place which no kind of eye watched".

True to its loudly proselytizing concerns, *Blood Games* has, as its main character, a preacher, Lucius Rumsey. He enters the narrative - with dawning symbolism - in a balmy, sun-baked, and falling, covered in faded incomplete words that once shouted him now whispered ESUS and AVES and KRIST and EWARE". Sputtering to an ignominious halt, this ramshackle vehicle of belief is soon headed off to the scrapyard - leaving Rumsey to salvage what's left of his faith by getting a new project under way. Increasingly dubious of the power of the word, he decides to bear silent witness to his convictions by walking around America, carrying a cross.

This pedestrian imagery, however, is spectacularly upstaged. A hideously mutilated corpse - the body of a local carpenter's son - is found hanging from the lightweight cross Rumsey has commissioned. Heavily plastered with raw reality, the decorously familiar icon takes on, as Leach suggests, a grimly new significance. And Rumsey's values have to alter to accommodate this. As mass-murder ravages the community, his Christianity succumbs to the onslaught of brutal experience. Belief in God is the first casualty: invited to preach in the local chapel, Rumsey - having seen the darkness - proclaims his new atheism with missionary zeal.

Set against the relentless heat of a Texas summer, *Blood Games* portrays life as hell. Abominations are unsimply piled up: murders are arbitrary; corpses dementedly disfigured. Compounding the violence, most of the victims are young, trusting, full of vitality. Attempts at order prove pitifully temporary: regression to barbarism is rife. The carpenter, for instance, initially an admirable character, decently proud of his skills, is soon reduced to hacking out a second, retaliatory cross - "It was stark and ugly, as if made by primitive man" - on which to torture the psychopath who killed his son.

Daubing his picture with the darkest possible shades, Christopher Leach makes his murderers not only horrendously damaging but horrendously damaged. One, his swollen face marked with "bruise-coloured shadows", is dying of cancer. Another, in fine physical condition, is mentally diseased. Together, savaging the healthy and well-adjusted, they are set up as macabre embodiments of the monstrous in-

jury life randomly deals out. By the end, *Blood Games* has heaped up twelve corpses and a welter of mortuary detail. And, in its overwhelming urge to show the world as terrifying, it adds to this already highly-coloured material a garish scattering of horror-film techniques. At moments of especial awfulness, the action freezes into some appalling picture. Gothic sound-effects keep the build-up sections tense; a car radiator gives a "small, shrill scream"; the uncanny cry of water-fowl kills the blood that will soon be spilt.

Though skilful at suspense, Leach is rather crude when it comes to characterization. Psychological subtlety is in short supply, and there is a hollowness about his efforts to inhabit personalities exposed to ex-

trauma. In a way this is almost a relief: you feel quite thankful that his characters never seem thoroughly alive since he makes them so thoroughly dead. Rumsey rhetorically asks his abashed congregation, in its final scene *Blood Games* hammers home this view with dangling irony. Pushing Rumsey to the periphery of the narrative, Leach abruptly switches to a hitherto minor character, a girl eager to escape small-town life for the bright lights. The novel's sarcastic closing tableau shows her, full of naïve optimism, racing off in a stolen car towards "a future she knew could only be clean and free and beautiful". Given Leach's grim world, it's to be hoped she doesn't stop to pick up any hitch-hikers.

By Patricia Craig

VALERIE MINER:
Blood Sisters
266pp. The Women's Press. £3.50.
0 7043 3872 6

Richard Crompton, in one of her "William" stories of the late 1930s, had a great deal of fun at the expense of the would-be knowledgeable who met in groups to discuss "the burning things of the day, such as Communism, vivisection and the longer skirt". Fifty-odd years on, the burning things of the day would appear to be terrorism, lesbianism and the political implications of lipstick; and the spirit in which they're treated, alas, is often less satirical than Richard Crompton's was.

Valerie Miner has written a novel on these themes, *Blood Sisters* (subtitled "an examination of conscience") is the story of two cousins, London-Irish and Irish-American, whose mothers were the twin daughters of an Irish patriot named Elizabeth O'Brien. The girls, Liz and Beth, meet in London for the first time in 1974. Californian Liz is a feminist and author of a book about witches. Beth, who emigrated from Dublin with her mother Gerry at the age of fourteen, is a part-time teacher and political activist ("What are we going to do for Bloody Sunday?"). Each cousin attempts to foist her opinions on the other, with scant success: one becomes a spokesman for the joys of lesbianism, while the other engages in terrorist acts.

There's enough material here to make several novels, and it is rather thoughtlessly assembled. Valerie Miner's grasp of Irish history and politics is shaky; and her chronology all over the place. She alludes to a number of real-life characters, notably Maud Gonne MacBride and Constance Markievicz (a facile way to get glamour and the appearance of authenticity into a rather drab narrative), without bothering to check the relevant dates. So, the girls' grandmother Elizabeth, we learn, "was the first choice of Major John MacBride before he married Maud Gonne". It is difficult to understand how this can be, since MacBride married Maud Gonne in 1903, when she was thirty-seven and he was thirty-three; and we're told more than once that Elizabeth was born in 1900. Valerie Miner, too, seems not to realize that 1927 was the year Countess Markievicz died. (References to "the Countess" eventually become quite ludicrous: of one present-day terrorist, Mindy, we read that she is "not quite as tall as Countess Markievicz...")

There are other gaffes. Elizabeth it was "who kept the Orangemen off our back for ten years", her daughter remembers; and this is odd because Orangemen do not march in Dublin on July 12 or any other date, their activities being confined to the North. Indeed, Valerie Miner has managed, remarkably, to write about the Provisional IRA and its current activities without considering the sectarian issue which is at the root of the conflict to a matter of dedicated terrorism versus British imperialism. The only Ulster Protestant mentioned in the book - Liz's father - is described as "hating the British as much as she [Polly, Liz's mother] grew up hating the Proddies" - again, this makes little sense; a girl growing up in Dublin in a republican family might hate the British connection, but hardly Protestants who are not numerous in the South, and never were; and although it's not impossible that a Protestant Ulsterman should "hate the British", it's a standpoint sufficiently uncommon to warrant an explanation. (And why, for heaven's sake, since Polly's - long dead - husband is the token Protestant in the novel, is he labelled with a typical Catholic surname - Devlin?)

By a piece of near-wit (probably unintentional) Caidin of Uallachain, one of the more popular personifica-

tions of Ireland (Yeats anglicized it as Kathleen in Houshian) becomes Kathleen in Houshian - a title which, aptly enough, fuses high romance and farce. (Houshian was originally an Irish surname, but not the one the poet had in mind.) Having reorganized the IRA (you might say in provincial and metropolitan wings, Valerie Miner wisely concentrates on the latter, though without displaying too much insight into the behaviour and motives of revolutionaries. Beth of the "big Irish heart", for instance, her Marxist-socialist-terrorist convictions are the product of an outlook utterly naïve:

Beth thought back on the small tipples in her classroom... Her pupils were poor kids, these parents had no choice but to leave Ireland. If the North's industry and rich agriculture were infused into the Irish economy, maybe Kevin and Seamus could have stayed home. Maybe her own father wouldn't have had to take such dangerous work and be killed.

It's not in any sense a satirical portrait: there is no narrative irony to turn such reflections as these into a painted exposure of rapid reasoning. Only at one moment, indeed, does a note of salutary exasperation get into the dialogue between the cousins, when Liz bursts out with, "Belfast, Shmelfast... You know as much about Belfast as I know about Dublin." But Liz's reservations about the ethics of terrorism are not exactly cogent either: "Violence was so unpredictable."

A lot of worrying goes on in the book. Beth worries about the plight of mothers in Turf Lodge, Belfast; Liz worries about "the Provisional Army's sexism"; Gerry worries about her daughter Beth's politics ("Holy Mary, protect her!"); Polly, in California, worries about Liz's dangerous life in England; "... those draughty flats with horns going off in the sideways and all that immigrant trouble from India and Pakistan." No to speak of unattractive practices. "Polly and I know this would happen all along. Women's poetry. Women's music. It all led to women's bodies."

Liz almost falls in love with her cousin (Beth does fall in love with hers, Liz's brother Larry, who follows his sister to England) but opts instead for stylish Gwen, wry and tender as only a lesbian (in feminist fiction) can be. This is where the sentimental element enters into the novel: "Sometimes their union was like distilled joy. Sometimes their love was a distress against a larger, alienating world."

Violence, as Liz recognized at an early stage, is unpredictable; people who play with firearms and explosives can expect to get hurt. If you insist on having a finger in the pie, you may lose your whole hand. This is the novel's central contention. But it takes in, as well as the themes discussed above, psychiatric disorder, family relations, social climbing in America and Liz's troubles with her job at the *Listener* (the *Listener*), where her superiors are all repulsive in various masculine ways. You cannot accuse Valerie Miner of being under-ambitious. It is plain, however, that she lacks the novelist's flair for selection. The description of Liz's first journey on a London bus, for instance, is laboured to the point of bathos ("To the conductor, these roads were just lines as familiar as the dark lines in her own pale palms"). You could say it was a documentary impulse, not a literary one, that got the author going - and, on the plane of documentation, the novel has many flaws. It is succint and accurate, in fact, in one area only, and that a small one: *Blood Sisters* is a very appropriate title.

The Personality of Ireland: Habits, Heritage and History, by E. Eszra Evans, originally delivered as the Wiles Lectures at the Queen's University, Belfast, and published in 1973 by Cambridge University Press, has recently been issued in paperback in a revised and enlarged form by the Blackstaff Press, Belfast (144pp. £3.95. 0 85640 238 9).

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Worrying about Ireland

By Patricia Craig

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The Queensberrys and their rules

By Terence De Vere White

BRIAN ROBERTS:

The Mad Bad Line
The Family of Lord Alfred Douglas
319pp. Hamish Hamilton, £15.
0 241 10637 0

To have written about the Zulu kings was a useful preparation for a book about Lord Alfred Douglas and his supremely dotty family. "The mad bad line", taken by Brian Roberts for his title, is a quotation from one of the home-truth letters Wilde was prone to write to his nasty friend in their times of trouble.

The hero of this book of franks is the seventh Marquess of Queensberry, Lord Alfred's father. He is remembered for two reasons, as Wilde's deadly enemy and as the inventor of the rules which govern hoxing - rules which in life he conspicuously ignored, hitting below the belt whenever opportunity offered. The rules were in fact the work of someone else, a friend of Cambridge days. In comparison with the early sunneter, his son, the Marquess was almost tolerable. Lord Alfred was a dandy character, a snake where his father was a toad, a creature whose immediate reaction when crossed was to charge head down at anyone in sight. When the Marquess appeared there was nothing to be done but send for the police - as Lord Rosebery discovered, when Queensberry followed him to Hamburg to continue a feud that had begun when Rosebery recommended Queensberry's eldest son Francis to Gladstone for an English peerage (as Viscount Drumlanrig) he was not qualified to sit in the House of Lords). Queensberry was all delighted acquiescence at first, but as his wily, changed neck abruptly without warning, and hounded Rosebery, Gladstone and even the Queen with abusive letters.

The Rosebery connection ceased to trouble when Drumlanrig, having got himself engaged to be married, proceeded to kill himself with a shot gun, emulating his sporting grandfather who had died in the same way. This was in October 1894. On the first day of April of the same year Queensberry had written to his younger son Alfred threatening to disown him and cut off supplies if his intimacy with this man Wilde" didn't cease forthwith.

Queensberry could now concentrate on Alfred, whose worst grievance against his father was the fact that he had sent him to Winchester. Lord Alfred contended that a divorced atheist, whose second marriage to a girl under age had been annulled, was in no position to play the role of outraged parent. But Wilde was so blatant in his conduct that Queensberry's anxiety was understandable in worldly terms. These troubles with his boys reminded him of his maternal grandfather Alfred Montgomery, whom he particularly disliked. A handsome Irish adventurer who brought good looks into the family, Montgomery had been taken up by the Marquess of Wellesley, the Viceroy, and appointed his secretary at the age of sixteen. Charlie's tongues said they were father and son.

Queensberry's appearance and manner of dress (suitable for a jockey) did not help him on solemn or tragic occasions. He was, when most serious, a figure of fun. He found his perfect setting at the Globe Theatre in 1882 where Tennyson's first play in prose and in to be performed was presented to an unwilling public. *The Promise of May* expressed the Laureate's aversion to the progressive spirit of the age. There was kissing on the first night when the villain, an archetypal night progressive, spoke in character at enormous length. Queensberry turned up on the third night and delivered a speech of protest during the first act at Tennyson's caricature of the contemporary free thinker. There was an uproar in the theatre before the play was allowed to continue. In the interval Queensberry spoke again and was eventually removed struggling from the theatre.

He revelled in the subsequent publicity as president of the British Secular Union he was given an opportunity to air in the press his ideas about marriage and divorce, ideas which seem perfectly reasonable today. But even allowing for the prevailing ethos, Queensberry never commanded attention as other prominent free thinkers of the time did. Perhaps as Mr Roberts suggests, he never fully understood his own theories. He had had a revelation when, as a young man, he had gone to look for the body of his brother Francis who had been killed in a controversial attempt to climb the Matterhorn in 1865. It was on the basis of this revelation that he had progressed to his position as president of the Secular Union.

Florence, Queensberry's youngest sister, who had been brought up a Roman Catholic, came to share his secularist opinions, but she was more intelligent. In her the family's twin inheritance was most pronounced: she had the Norfolk's enthusiasm for horses and their wives' humane intelligence. The Dowager Lady Queensberry had created a stir when her O'Donnell blood was quickened in 1867 by the fate of the "Manchester Martyrs". In a rail on a police van to rescue Fenian prisoners a policeman was shot and three of the rescue party were sentenced to death in consequence. Lady Queensberry sent a donation to the men for the relief of their families.

Florence too was to interest herself in Ireland, but she had her brother's knack of antagonizing the parties she assisted as much as the ones she opposed. She began her public career by writing an account of a strange adventure in Patagonia. After that she persuaded the *Morning Post* to employ her as war correspondent in South Africa. Peace had been made when she arrived at Cape Town in 1881. That did not deter her. Having overstepped on the proceedings of the Transvaal Royal Commission at Government House, she became bored and decided instead to espouse the Zulu cause. It had a great merit: it annoyed the Boers whom she hated. Back in London she made trouble by sending a letter to the press from the Zulu king into which she had inserted a paragraph by another hand to strengthen the argument.

She became in due course a champion of women's freedom, a member of the Rational Dress Society, a vegetarian. She was an admirable person, but the family's manic desire for self-advertisement troubled her. One gets the impression of fight and pursuit in her efforts to entangle herself in African and Irish affairs. No one took her seriously. She was indirectly responsible for the death of Queen Victoria's beloved John Brown. The Queen sent him to investigate an extraordinary account put out by Florence of having been attacked by two Irishmen dressed up as women, in a wood at Windsor. John Brown could find no footprints in the mud, and caught the cold that killed him.

Florence was inclined to tittle. It was one of the few interests she shared with her husband, Sir Alexander Duff. She was known to some of their friends as Sir Always and Lady Sometimes Tippy.

Of the remaining siblings, Gertrude, the eldest, entered a convent when she had been crossed in love, but she came out finally after two attempts and, inevitably, started to write novels. But *Brown at a Berry* in two volumes did not find a public, and she was pleased to answer her priest brother Archibald's call for a housekeeper for the home for Catholic boys he presided over in Paddington. He left her in charge while he went to Canada, and returned to find Gertrude at thirty-six married to Thomas Stock, the boy who looked after the bakery on which the home's income depended. He was sixteen when Gertrude met him.

Jim, the remaining brother, lived in the shadow of his sister Florence. He drank heavily and took to novel-writing after he married. His manner of filling in a census form raised doubts about his sanity; he had to be looked for, and when discovered he had cut his throat.

Mr Roberts has no new light to shed on the Bosie/Wilde imbroglio but he gives an arresting account of Bosie in retirement. He had married and separated from his wife; their son was in a mental home. Having formally re-

nounced homosexuality, he had taken a vow of celibacy and become a Roman Catholic. The Dowager, who had always spoiled him, changed her faith in order to give him support. They lived together, on and off, until she died in 1935.

Bosie tried hard to be nice to visitors after all three years of vindictive litigation, largely motivated by a desire for a better place than Robert Ross in the Wilde story. If he liked you he was prepared to discuss what Wilde and he "did". Not everyone realized that the old man saw himself as another Goethe in Weimar. All hell broke loose when Yeats left him out of the *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*. Douglas sent an open telegram to all the serious newspapers. "The attitude of a minor poet to a major one", he explained. "And Thomas Moore had edited such a book, he would have omitted Keats and Shelley." He died in 1945.

The manner throughout this book is vigorous, favouring direct words are not always used according to their precise meaning. But the final result is lively entertainment.

To do with books

By Nigel Cross

ROY STOKES:

Michael Sadleir 1888-1957
Scarcecrow Press, 52 Liberty Street,
Metuchen, New Jersey. \$8.50.
0 8018 1292 4

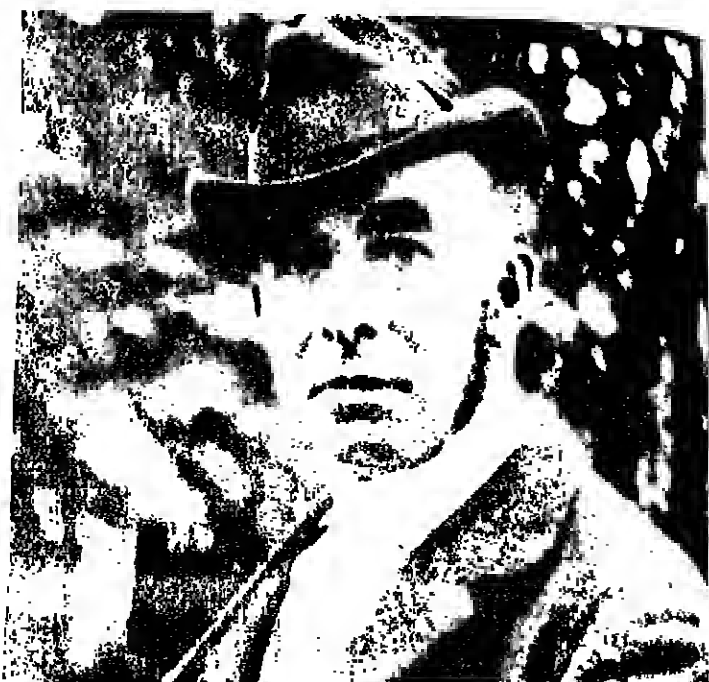
Michael Sadleir liked to describe himself as a bookman and few people can have had more to do with books since Caxton; he was a novelist, essayist, critic, biographer, bibliographer, book-collector, and director and chairman of the National Book Council. He was steeped in nineteenth-century literary and social history, so much so that it is difficult to believe that he died as recently as 1957. In his imagination he was a Victorian in the Mayhew mould: fascinated, even mildly thrilled by the sordid, erotic London sub-culture of the nineteenth century. His novels, otherwise turgid affairs, were popular for their meticulous descriptions of Victorian prostitutes and the rent dresses - "from the shrouder slaves to the waist" - of abused servant-girls. In the 1940s this sort of thing was strong enough to sell 150,000 copies in hardback.

Sadleir's friends, however, "tactfully never mentioned" his "novels", and it was in the more sedate area of bibliography that he achieved his greatest reputation. His *Excursions in Victorian Bibliography* (1922) was the first attempt to map nineteenth-century literature with the same precision that Greg and Pollard had mapped the

literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Realizing that major writers like Dickens and George Eliot would never be short of adequate bibliographies, Sadleir concentrated on minor nineteenth-century writers, most of whom he also happened to collect. He went on to publish biographies of Bulwer, Blessington and D'Ossay and Anthony Trollope - the last some years before its subject became the focus of what Sadleir disapprovingly called "Trollopean Studies". He crowned a lifetime's work on the nineteenth century with *XIX Century Fiction* (1951), a detailed and descriptive catalogue of his personal collection of first editions including such trivial but historically interesting writers as Lady Charlotte Barry and Lady Georgiana Chatterton - George Eliot's "silly lady novelists".

It was the infatuated collector in Sadleir that inspired the bibliographer: "When year after year I have visited him in his office," wrote Harold Nicolson, "I have observed an ever increasing array of Victorian yellow backs upon his shelves. I have made no comment on this sad collection, even as he observed a hypodermic syringe upon the dressing table of a friend."

This "sad collection" went the way of most - to America. Over 10,000 volumes were bought by UCLA and the Trollope collection went to Princeton. It is appropriate, then, that the man who has given American scholars years of fun and miles of theses should be the subject of an anthology-cum-bibliography published in New Jersey and edited in British Columbia. For



Wilde's "Screaming Scarlet Marquess", the pugnacious Queensberry in later life - from the book reviewed here.

Roy Stokes, it is clearly a labour of love. He gives much of the flavour of Sadleir's style and engaging pedagogy through extracts from his books and essays, as well as a comprehensive checklist of his wide range of published work.

Among the pieces Professor Stokes has disinterred, it is worth quoting some length from these perceptive and remarkably undated comments, from Sadleir's Dent Memorial lecture, on the practice of reviewing:

The sad truth is that book critics generally have consented to the debauching of their craft. Only a small extent can their surrender be attributed to economic causes; for literary criticism is very poorly paid. . . . It is to be feared that the most serious of the literary critic's sins must mostly be ascribed to a desire for individual publicity, which is largely due to the fact that the modern reviewer is too often an author also and known as such.

Instead of renouncing beings, proud of their critical activity and not themselves authors who do reviewing in their spare time, reviewers are nowadays literary names on sale to newspapers. For the sake of getting their individualities blazoned in the press and in columns of advertisements, they have surrendered the detachment which alone confers the right to criticize and have become, in the eyes of the public, mere party men. Their influence has in consequence gone; and their place as public mentors has been taken by publishers, advertising of a blatant and mass-suggestive kind.

Fifty years on . . .

The TLS of July 16, 1931, reviewed Elizabeth Wordsworth's *Poems and Plays*, published by the Oxford University Press at 4s 6d:

Miss Wordsworth's memory covers a period of eighty years; she is a Victorian poetess. The volume of Victorian dramatic verse which she now publishes contains meditations on the Franco-Prussian war, on the babyhood of Robert Hugh Benson (1873), on the early death of his brother Martin five years later, on the death of George Eliot, on Queen Victoria's first Jubilee, on "The Old Postage Stamp, with the head of Queen Victoria", and in all these and many others we find the sweetness, the substance, the security which were of the atmosphere of the time.

Farewell, dear face, which we have known Familiar as our mother's own: A million homes have felt the thrill Of thy sweet presence, mute and still.

O Royal head, O loving heart Whose kindness did to power impart A might beyond the might of force From motherhood's divinely source O Enquest, whose illustrious name

Has silenced envy, beggared fame, In history's page how bright appears The sum of thine unequalled years!

In a charming introductory paragraph Miss Wordsworth dedicates her volume to those who in a world of change hold fast to the things that are changeless and enduring. Who knows if it is not part of the virtue of stormy times like these, that it increases their number and strengthens the determination and precision of their hold? If one were to criticize the austere attitude which underlies and animates Miss Wordsworth's verse - a serene little inclination to critique - it would be on the ground that with all its negligence and scornfulness, it is at grips with problems which its predecessors were unaware of. Many who thought themselves anchored were drifting with the stream in a comfortable boat; for the buoyancy of success affects even the great, as we see it do in America today. Yet Miss Wordsworth's poetry is at its best when it owes most to its epoch. The plays she wrote in

later years for performance by her students at Lady Margaret Hall will be read with pleasure chiefly by those who were originally most closely associated with them, though of course they are part of the history of the higher education of women, as all her author's life has been. Many of her lyrics, too, are best describable as good thoughts and pleasant patterns agreeably and tastefully combined. Her periods and her music are most convincing when she celebrates her country, its beauty, its power, its high vocation:

England is everywhere! From East to West Her speech is echoed, and her face is known;

Strange destiny! enfolded in the breast Of men of olden time Who in her infant clime Worked on the fancies, the thoughts that make the world their own.

Or praises the good old days, when life was calm and contented as a summer's day:

The old outspoken days of healthy lives, When Being was from Seeming undivorced, And Taste was not assumed, nor Feeling forced.

A Romantic for radicals

By David Bromwich

PAUL FOOT:

Red Shelley
293pp. Sidgwick and Jackson, £12.95.
(paperback, £5.95).
0 283 98679 4

From Leigh Hunt to Shaw, and again from Shaw to our own day, something has kept alive the feeling that the case for romanticism as a political movement depends on what we make of Shelley. The reason lies partly in the excellence of his disciples; but this in turn came from the purity of his example. He found his principles early, and allowed them to develop in ways not recommended by a timely wisdom. He brought in exhaustible reserves of energy to the work of agitation and public defence; and throughout his life he refused to make disenchantment with a person or event the pretext for disenchantment with a cause. In a fine tribute, Marx is supposed to have called him "a thorough revolutionary" who "would have remained in the vanguard of all his life" in the contrast with Byron, who "had his development in the bourgeois".

These sentences contain a mistake, an anachronism, and a perhaps inadvertent slur. For what Burke actually wrote was, "learning will he cast into the mire, and trampled down under the hoofs of a swinish multitude". A, not the, swinish multitude; that is, "a mob, which may be swinish", rather than "the masses, who are contrast with Byron, who 'had his development in the bourgeois'".

The mistake was perpetuated in the working-class literature of the 1970s and 1980s, and served its purpose admirably as a debater's point against Burke. What reason can there be to repeat it in 1981? "Best-seller" is the anachronism, and by joining it with his reference to "fashionable areas", Foot manages to suggest that Burke sold himself in the middle and upper classes. This charge Burke answered in his "Letter to a Noble Lord" with an earnestness conclusive enough to silence the jeers of anyone who has read it.

Yet there as elsewhere, one feels that Foot may have been betrayed into crudeness simply by his headlong rush to inform us with pre-digested facts. His prose at its best is competent journalism, with a touch of the gossip-columnist's relish for bad matters. At its worst it is clumsily figurative, and without a trace of Shelley's mastery of the middle style.

We are told of Castlereagh, for instance, with what degree of commiseration it is impossible to say. "The psychopathic introspection which led to his suicide was not far below the surface all his life". In another version of the same metaphor, Shelley "was politically isolated and his isolation ran through his writing like an open wound". By the later chapters, even the briefest descriptions have become the sport of caprice: Rousseau is "a tasteful philosopher"; Keats "a radical in his spare time"; Peacock, without much qualification, "the Tory Peacock". Foot's taste of style, however, is in keeping with his grasp of history.

Of the 1794 treason trials, he remarks that the prosecution's "case was so weak and [Scott's] rhetoric so verbose that the jury found the accused not guilty of sedition". But the unwillingness of Englishmen in that year to go the whole length of the government's definition of "constructive treason", and with the aristocratic disdain that helped Erskine to discredit under cross-examination the working-class witnesses on whose testimony Scott's case was founded: be dismissed one with the words, "I am tired of your face". This event belongs, of course, to Shelley's childhood; but Foot's lapses extend well into the mature years; they are especially apt to occur where any judgment of personality is called for. After quoting many stretches of "A Philosophical View of Reform", he wonders why Shelley failed to publish it in his own lifetime, and then speculates that Cobbett might have been just the man for the job. It is hard to indicate what is wrong with this judgment, except by directing readers to the complete works of Cobbett and Shelley. They were about as antipathetic as two contemporaries can ever have been, who shared the name of "radical". Cobbett downright, practical, agrarian; Shelley visionary, theoretical, a bulldozer of the just city. These are com-

monplaces, and one would avoid repeating them if they were not missing even from the ground floor of Foot's understanding.

Critical books have fattered worse than this on points of historical background, and still survived by the force of a central argument. The trouble with *Red Shelley* is that one cannot test the argument because one cannot find it. Foot seems equally interested in Shelley's poetry and prose, though he excludes everything that could be called a lyric, allegories like "The Witch of Atlas" and "The Sensitive Plant", which have no obvious political resonance, and "The Triumph of Life", possibly because it does not square with his title. Still, that leaves a great deal. In prose, from the *Queen Mab* notes and "A Vindication of Natural Diet" to "A Declaration of Poetry" and "A Philosophical View of Reform", Shelley moved from a dogmatic creed of atheism and necessity to a trust in the complicity of the spirit of the age with the voluntary efforts of men. The poetry has its backward looks and recalcitrant interludes, but there too Shelley advanced with steadily widening sympathies. Progressions of this sort Foot leaves us to trace for ourselves. His plan is to ransack at Shelley's that offers an extract from the relevant quotations are then displayed under such chapter-headings as "Republican", "Atheist", "Leveller", "Feminist", and "Reform or Revolution". The liveliest sub-headings, "The Contradiction Exposed" and "The Contradiction Resolved", turn on what might seem a difficult question, the political morality of revenge. But in these sections, for thirty pages or so, Foot comes very close to presenting a thesis, and if elaborated it would be a controversial one. He believes that Shelley began with a lion's suspicion of revolutionary violence and ended in whole-hearted acceptance of it.

The bulk of his evidence is drawn from *Prometheus Unbound*. A concise summary of the plot, a paragraph each for Prometheus, Asia, and Panthea, and Foot is ready to ask "Who is Demogorgon?" - to which he replies with a striking piece of etymological research:

One answer, a very obvious one which is often overlooked, is that he was who his name said he was. Shelley was always making up names from Greek words. Demos in Greek means the people; gorgon, the monster. Demogorgon is the "people-monster".

After that it is all downhill. There was a radical working-class paper called the *Gorgon*, started in April 1818. From the possibility that Shelley heard of it, we make an easy transition to the probability that a copy reached him in Rome, while he was asking himself how to dispose of Jupiter. Foot's rechristening of Demogorgon has broad consequences for Asia's descent. She visits him, on this view of the play, to raise his class consciousness - essentially, to give him a good harangue. Her questions are all rhetorical questions, and are meant to remind the people-monster how unendurable its life has become. When sufficiently aroused it can be relied on to storm the barricades. Meanwhile Jupiter, also a student of etymology, hopes that the revolution will stay in the hands of its moderate or "Promethean" sect:

The tyrant begs to be judged and dealt with by the idealistic intellectual of his own class, rather than by the people. He knows that from the rebels of his own class he can expect mercy, and, with mercy, probably a breathing space in which to reorganize his forces, to double his propaganda, and start the counter-revolution. . . . From the masses, however, there is no pity, no release, no respite, no refuge, no appeal. Jupiter sinks at once without a trace, lacking Demogorgon and the ugly spirit of the revolution with him.

Something of the oddness of this

will be plain even to a reader whose memories of the play have grown indistinct. Etymology apart, and Foot's is an extreme instance of the "bookish" variety - three objectives seem decisive. First, in order to assign Demogorgon so narrow an allegorical significance, one has to ignore the name he gives himself. "Awful shape, what art thou?" demands Jupiter; and he is told: "Eternity. Demand no direr name." This need not be the end of all speculation about him but it ought to be the beginning. A permanent difficulty for most readers is that they cannot regard the shrewdness of time as familiarly as Shelley did: when, to take another celebrated phrase, he calls poets "the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present", the figure is somehow less uneasy to him than it is to us. But for Foot such difficulties do not exist. Nor do those which follow from a second objection, concerning Demogorgon's meaning in time. For he is named by Milton in the description of Satan's journey through Chaos and old Night (*Paradise Lost*, II, 965). Again, this hardly closes the discussion: in Milton too the name is enigmatic. But it does finish off the *Gorgon* theory: a copy of the paper could not possibly have reached Milton before 1667, except on the supposition, which Foot expressly rejects, that Demogorgon is Eternity and conveyed it there himself.

A third objection graver than the rest is that Foot loves revenge, and Shelley hated it. Foot believes that the kings and tyrants of Shelley's poetry "vary in brutality But they are all anti-heroes, all to be challenged, hunted down and overthrown." Everything Shelley fought in his own life, every savagery of the moral systems he tried to explode, is contained in that one phrase, *hunted down*. He wrote *Prometheus* to portray a hero who breaks the cycle in which oppression can only be matched by counter-oppression, and curse returned for curse. For the cycle itself, he had come to think, was a kind of tyranny over man. Prometheus outdared the sublimity of Jupiter when he says,

torment and solitude,
Scorn and despair, - these are mine empire.
More glorious far than that which thou surveyest
From thine unenvied throne. O Mighty Ood!

But he ceases to be Jupiter's rival and becomes Shelley's hero only when he revokes his curse. That is the moment of triumph, and psychologically the end of Shelley's drama. The action continues because

Admirers, especially in the latter part

Prometheus is still chained to his rock, and Jupiter seated on his throne. Shelley needed an agent both more than human and less, to free the hero and punish his tormenter without delivering the audience into the satisfactions of revenge, and for this he invented Demogorgon. Yet far from vanishing when his work is complete - as Foot remembers him to have done - Demogorgon speaks the final lines of the play. They instruct us to conquer tyranny by means not themselves tyrannical. "To longive wrongs darker than death or night. With these winds compare Prometheus' pity. 'no pity, no release, no respite, no refuge, no appeal'".

One thing that seems to have mis-guided Foot is an episode of *The Revolt of Islam*, in which a tyrant, captured but then forgiven, returns to the same wicked practices from which he might have been stayed forever. Should he in fact have been killed? Was this Shelley's confession that on some occasions forgiveness may be wrong? Foot thinks so. But for Shelley a moral principle was at stake. He would have envisaged the same wicked outcome to show the value of upholding his principle anyway. *Prometheus* has a happier outcome, without turning justice into a licence to hunt; and yet it seems honestly to face the hunter's arguments. In this respect it was a great improvement over *The Cenci*, where Shelley had admitted that the whole interest of the drama lay in "the restless and automating casuistry with which men seek the justification of Benetice". Her wish for revenge, though a "pernicious mistake", he explained as one necessary constituent of a tragic character. But *Prometheus* gave him a hero whose interest was not tragic in this sense. He could therefore claim that Prometheus was "a more poetical character" than Milton's Satan, because Satan "engenders in the mind a pernicious casuistry which leads us to weigh his faults with his wrongs, and to excuse the former because the latter exceed all measure". Beatrice followed Satan's pattern whereas Prometheus goes beyond him. Most readers have probably felt this, whether they know the prefaces or not. Yet Foot's very different view is a consequence of his reading as well as his politics: the work of Shelley's that got to him first, to which he still refers for his idea of Shelley's deepest strength, appears to have been not *Prometheus*, or the "Defence", or any of the rdes, but *Queen Mab*.

The poem has always had its admirers, especially in the latter part

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JOHN MURRAY

of the nineteenth century, among a distinguished group of middle-class recluses who might have acknowledged him as the last of their line. But on the whole it has remained for Shelley's advocates the work from which his reputation must needs be protected, and for his antagonists the right place from which to launch the attack. Paul Foot is so unwary an advocate that he becomes an antagonist by default, but perhaps there is something in the poem itself that makes this happen. All the upologies for his youthful extravagance have not concealed the fact that *Queen Mab* is rant. It is rant because its sentiments, however heartfelt in general, are unlit in every particular. This is easy to see in the famous set-pieces denouncing Gaul, and only a little less so in ordinary passages of exposition:

Blind and hardened, they,
Who hope no peace amid the storms of
And cover power they know not how to
And sight to pleasure they refuse to give,
Madly they frustrate still their own
And, where they hope that quiet rest
Which virtue pictures, bimetals of
Pining regrets, and vain repentances,
Disce, disgust, and lassitude, pervade
Their valueless and miserable lives.

This is the Shelley who, because he made no allowance for the common passions of men, was sometimes worse than useless to the cause he took up; who wrote sentences so apocryphically bigoted that it is impossible to guess their context, and any context makes them absurd. "How much longer will man continue to pump for the glut of death, his most insidious, implacable, and eternal foe?" In the years of *Queen Mab*, that was Shelley's way of announcing that he would not eat meat. He talked like a man who could never forgive wrongs darker than the shadows in man; and Picochet caricatured him as the author of *Philosophic Gas*; or, a Pro-

phet for a General Illumination of the Human Mind.

Queen Mab is as good a starting point as any other poem of Shelley's. But he was angry when a pirated edition made it compete with his later poems; and to employ it as a touchstone for then is monstrous. Can it nevertheless serve as a touchstone for his politics? — or are his politics, where they still have something to teach us, closer to the spirit of his greatest poetry? With an active and wholly serious intellect like Shelley's, the distinction between inspiration and sense may be less rewarding than it looks, and Foot concedes far too much when he says that "as a warbler, Shelley is at fault." There is a sloppiness and excess in his language, and his metaphors which the discipline of a Keats or a Wordsworth would have ironed out. Equally surprising is a contrast he proposes more than once, between "lyric excesses" and a "cold and clear" definition of society. Judgments like these are all the more curious in view of Foot's declared purpose of freeing us from the academic prison. For they reproduce an academic stereotype of Shelley which was pervasive between 1910 and 1940 — roughly the years of Foot's childhood and education. The only difference is that in the earlier version we were asked to read the lyrics as nothing, and in Foot's we are allowed if we like to jump the lyrics, as long as we hold on to the politics.

Fortunately we need not make the choice. It is wiser to begin any appreciation with Wordsworth's praise of Shelley for his "workman-ship". He knew that Shelley's work was remote from his own but hardly a failure of his kind, and seems to have understood better than most readers his refusal to connect success in poetry with success in looking steadily at his subject. Shelley's genius was too fluent to be mastered by Wordsworth's appeal for the clear and distinct image, and it gathered force at the point where hatred of Wordsworth's politics coincided with

the search for a style less pledged to the visible. This view of Shelley's poetry is not new. It was sketched three decades ago by his most eloquent modern defender, Frederick Pottle. Yet it is remarkable how few critics since then have used it to widen the discussion of Shelley's politics. Anyone who wishes to pursue the experiment further can find in sequence "Alastor", "To Wordsworth", "Peter Bell the Third", and "The Triumph of Life". In one way "Alastor" is the simplest case, since we can imagine the question Shelley asked himself before he wrote it: "What would become of *The Evermore* if the Solitary refused all correction, and the Poet refused to side with the world against him?" The poem, "excessive" and very great, was Shelley's answer, and for him its politics were implicit.

Again, with "Peter Bell the Third", the provocation came from Wordsworth's poetry, but the response for Shelley could hardly stand at parody. As a parody his poem is not as good as J. H. Reynolds's; as an invective it outdoes Byron; for its power is that of the stump-orator who has lost the battle to control his anger. One of Wordsworth's anti-Napoleonic odes had prayed to the God "whom most dreaded instrument / In working out a pure intent, / Is Man — armed for mutual slaughter, / — Yea, Carnage is thy daughter!" In answer Shelley must have planned to fill a stanza, but then he sat down to write:

Then Peter wrote like the Devil; —
In one of which he meekly said: —
"May Carnage and Slughter,
Thy niece and thy daughter,
May Rapine and Famine,
Thy girls ever cranning,
Clut thee with living and dead!
"May death and Damnation
And Condemnation,
Flit up from Hell with pure intent!
Slash them at Manchester,
Glasgow, Leeds and Chester;
Drench all with blood from Avon to Trent."
"Let thy body-guard yeomen
Hew down babes and women,
And laugh with him in triumph till
Heaven be rent!

When Moloch in Jewry
Munched children with lury
It was thou, Devil, dining
with pure intent."

His protest against the massacre at home has its start in one glimpse of the hellish countenance of the poet who sang the glories of massacre abroad.

"To Wordsworth" and "The Triumph of Life", at the beginning and end of Shelley's debate with Wordsworth, show how inseparable throughout were his political and poetic topics. In the early summer, Wordsworth's betrayal marks the passing from sight of "a lone star, whose light did shine/On some frail bark in winter's midnight rout." Six years later, in the "Vision" that Shelley left incomplete, he returns to the immortality Ode's light of common day, which has become "a cold glare, intenser than the sun/But icy cold." The stars are all hidden now, and enough common light is confused with theirs to obscure them for ever. Instead of Wordsworth's child, "who daily farther from the east/Must travel", we have the shade of Rousseau, like "an old root which grew / To strange distortion out of the hill side", who invites Shelley to join the dance of death, and by recommitting his fate tells why hope was made to be conquered. This is Shelley's ode to the east wind, and it deserves more readers among those who will not accept it as his last word in any but a trivial sense. The last word, if we need it, came in "Two Spirits: An Allegory", which Shelley wrote as a dialogue. He worked into its figurative language both the political risks he took — "The clash of the hail across the plain" does not refer to weather — and his resolution to continue as he had begun:

I see the light, and I hear the sound;
I'll sail on the flood of the tempest dark,
With the calm within and the light around
Which makes night day;
And thou, when the gloom is deep and stark.

Look from thy doll earth, slumber-
bound,
My moon-like flight thou then dost
mark,
On high, far away

RUSSIAN HISTORY

The enlightened empress

By John Keep

ISABEL DE MADARIAGA:
Russia in the Age of Catherine the Great
608pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £20.
0 297 77394 1

Catherine has not been lucky with her biography. Where other Russian autocrats have been immortalized by a Theodor Schiemann or a Reinhard Wittram, the sheer extravagance of the great empress's personal life seems hitherto to have condemned her to misreading by retailers of romantic court gossip. True, there was the worthy V. A. Biltzov, who a hundred years ago began an exhaustive scholarly study of the reign, but for reasons that have never been satisfactorily explained his work did not progress far beyond Catherine's accession by the coup d'état of 1762.

In recent decades both Soviet and Western historians have explored a number of specialized aspects of late eighteenth-century Russian history, but no one was bold enough to try to draw the threads together. The task seemed dauntingly difficult: the published sources are legion and widely scattered, the archives difficult of access. Twelve years ago Isabel de Madariaga, of the University of London, took up the challenge. She has produced what for a long time to come will stand as the definitive work on Catherine and her times — judicious, balanced and remarkably well informed. At last the empress is considered as she deserves to be: as a stateswoman, a constitutional politician who could bring out the best in her subordinates, a far-sighted planner whose very faults have a touch of grandeur about them. Social, economic and administrative aspects of the reign are all dealt with in full, as of course is foreign policy, the field in which the author made her debut with a study of the Armed Neutrality of 1780.

It used to be said that here Catherine scored her most brilliant successes, for by war and diplomacy she greatly enhanced the wealth, prestige and security of the Russian empire. Such views command little sympathy today, at least in the Western world. Anyone seeking to understand the historical roots of the present Polish crisis will find this work absorbing reading. It was Catherine's enlightened but ruthless government that took the lead in destroying the Polish state by the partitions of 1772-95 — an act which shocked even hard-bitten contemporaries. After all, by a treaty of 1768 St Petersburg had solemnly undertaken to guarantee the integrity of the Commonwealth, which was ruled by a Russian nominee. Some of the tactics employed have a distressingly familiar ring: bribery and manipulation of local dignitaries, steadily increasing quotas of military force, and propaganda justified each move in terms of European peace and stability. Most of Catherine's advisers endorsed her forward policy, and she overruled those who did not. "We can do whatever we want to Poland", she muttered at one point, after the Polish Diet had adopted the Constitution of May 3, 1791. This document was "in no sense Jacobinical", Professor de Madariaga comments, "but to Catherine there was not much to choose between revolutionary Poland and revolutionary France". Intention in the former country was both more feasible and more rewarding.

The partitions brought into the empire several million non-Russians — Jews and Lithuanians as well as Poles — who were to prove difficult if not impossible to assimilate. Worse still, for the next century or so, Russia's foreign policy was tied to that of her partners in the crime, Prussia and Austria. Nationalists as well as democrats often protested against this, but *Realpolitik* had to take precedence. The long-term disadvantages outweighed the immediate gains, and the conventional judgment needs revision. De Madariaga mimes no words: "it is here, in the field in which she prided herself on her skill, that [Catherine] did the greatest disservice to Russia".

she writes. "The authoritarian and disagreeable tone adopted towards the Poles foreshadows the Stalinist style of diplomacy in the twentieth century."

Should the same be said of the Turks? They get little sympathy here, although they were the next most prominent victims of Russia's imperial expansion during this period. This attitude reflects partly the traditional bias of Western historians, and partly a feeling that the Ottoman conquests had been more violent than the Polish, so that Turkey's decline seems somehow a natural phenomenon which excuses the predatory policies of her Christian neighbours.

Yet there was nothing inevitable about the fate of the southern steppe-lands during Catherine's reign. Her aims at first were very moderate: little more than commercial access to the Black Sea. It was the great military and naval victories of 1770, Russia's *annus mirabilis*, that whetted the imperial appetite. Soon she was calling for the cession of Azov and the Crimea, for a temporary Russian occupation of the Danubian provinces (the modern Romania), and even an island or two in the Aegean.

This alarmed other European powers, especially Austria. Maria Theresa first tried to bolster the Turks but then, after Catherine called her bluff, settled for compensation at the Poles' expense. Her successor Joseph II was still more forthcoming, for he entered into an alliance with the formidable empress and in 1787 went to war on her side. Meanwhile Russia had absorbed the formally independent Crimean khanate, and as a result of the second Turkish war she advanced her southwestern frontier to the Danube. It was the turn of the British to express concern; but slogans were dubbed on the walls of London, "No War with Russia", and Pitt's Triple Alliance crumbled.

In conventional terms the vast expenditure of Russian blood and treasure was worth while. The fertile plains of New Russia could be developed as the granary of the empire (and of much of Europe too) in the following century; the new fleet at Sevastopol dominated the Black Sea and would soon penetrate the Mediterranean; and the way was open for further conquests in the Caucasus. But the advances of imperial power, borne on a great tide of peasant sellers, spelt the loss of the liberties enjoyed by the Cossacks of the Dnieper and the Don. Serf bondage was extended to the rural inhabitants of the old Ukraine (or "Little Russia", as it was patronizingly called by officialdom), and later in the southlands as well. De Madariaga stresses that this was as much the work of the local Cossack élites as it was of St Petersburg. On the Don in particular the violent uprising of Emelyan Pugachev in 1773-74 intensified the eagerness of the *sharshina* to align themselves with the Russian nobility by rendering service to the state.

Grigory Potemkin, Catherine's eccentric but gifted consort, whom she appointed viceroy of New Russia, was a flexible and generally benign administrator. Only later did bureaucratic centralization become the rule in all Russia's borderlands. Catherine initiated this development, but its realization was still a far-off dream. She knew she had to temporize. As she put it in a letter to the emperor, "I am very anxious to have your notes for the Recluse. I cannot say how much importance I attach to this."

What would the situation have been after the Pugachev revolt, which badly frightened both government and gentry. De Madariaga has no time for the romantic myth-making about this insurrection fashionable in some quarters. She shows convincingly that at the start Pugachev had no thought of unleashing a serf revolt, but resorted to this as an expedient during his campaign; that the development of a counter-government, complete with aristocratic titles, could scarcely be reconciled with the rebels' egalitarian ideals; and that despite efforts to impose discipline they remained a disolute rabble: "executions took place at any moment; the surrounding ravines were full of unburied corpses; drunken feasting was common". This was no "peasant war" (as Soviet historians maintain) but a protest against the innovative absolutist state by lawless frontiersmen who banked against a retrograde traditionalism. Peasants who joined the movement often did so under duress.

Catherine urged mercy in the treatment of captured rebels, and by eighteenth-century standards their fate was not unduly harsh. However, she contented herself with measures to strengthen the local administration and failed

to grapple seriously with the social grievances that had fuelled the insurrection. The 1785 nobles' charter, which guaranteed and expanded their privileges, said nothing about relations between masters and serfs. At that juncture, de Madariaga suggests, the empress could go no further:

It was not fear of the nobility which prevented Catherine from intervening decisively in the vessel field of serfdom. It was rather the conviction, particularly deeply rammed home by the Pugachev revolt, that the time was not yet ripe to tackle a problem so closely linked with public order, finance and military strength.

This argument will not convince everyone. Why did Catherine abandon a draft project to grant a measure of autonomy and security of property to the state peasants? This would have strengthened the government in its dealings with noble serf-owners. It is true that Catherine deserves credit for limiting the ways in which free men could be enlisted, and that the charges levelled against her by nineteenth-century Populist writers — for instance, that she curbed the peasants' right to petition the crown against their masters — were exaggerated. Nevertheless it does seem that after 1774 she lost her nerve and opted for a policy of procrastination and passivity. Even in her early liberal phase she believed that peasants worked better if they were tied to the land. Her object was to eliminate the worst barbarities of serfdom, not to upset the system. We cannot reasonably expect her to have emancipated the serfs, for this would have necessitated a loyal bureaucracy (and a credit network) that did not yet exist; but some move towards regulation of dues, as was attempted in the Baltic, was not beyond the bounds of possibility.

If Catherine emerges a little whiter than white here in regard to social issues, she deserves the praise she gets for her enlightened cultural policy. She did much to encourage the visual arts, as every visitor to Leningrad can testify. She held tolerance to be a virtue: from 1783 anyone could set up a printing-press, if the police were notified; and censorship was remarkably

lax by later standards. The persecution of such free-thinkers as Novikov and Radishchev was regrettable, but she acted from *raison d'état*, not from wounded vanity as many critics have alleged. These were troubled times: the Russian masses maintained links with foreign countries; and Jacobin democracy was irrelevant to the country over which she ruled. Catherine has too often been judged by the repressive acts of her fearful last years. Instead of by her creative contributions to Russia's intellectual life — not perhaps her own indifferent literary ventures but her readiness to foster an independent spirit among the nascent intelligentsia.

The eccentricities of the empress's emotional life are discussed here straightforwardly and receive the modest share of attention they deserve. Much can be explained by the unfortunate circumstances of her first courtship. She was no monster, but a warm-hearted, generous woman, witty, courageous and venal, who found in Potemkin a spirited consort worthy of her talents. Their partnership had a moving quality rare in royal annals, and is with everything Catherine did it was its initial political purpose. She was of course mortally vain, and indulged in a fondness for extravagant display that shocks us today, when we expect our rulers to behave with less ostentation but more capriciousness. Although she wielded almost unlimited power, Catherine seldom abused it. She was a humane person who sought to civilize social and political relationships in her still barbarous empire. Nineteenth-century writers used to speak of "a softening of morals", and the term is not inapt. She tried to encourage what de Madariaga calls "a civil cast of mind", and up to a point she succeeded: "Russian society relaxed in a new-found sense of security". The despotic tendencies latent in the autocracy were contained. The progress achieved could not be undone even by such narrow-minded disciplinarians as Paul or Nicholas I: it would take a revolution to do that.

Isabel de Madariaga's well-rounded portrait of the great Catherine does belated justice to a ruler who, in Russia closer to Europe at a time when both stood to profit from such contact.

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Finite, fleeting fragments

By Christopher Salvesen

THOMAS MCFARLAND:
Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin
432pp. Columbia and Princeton University Presses. £17.55.
0 691 06437 7

"Put together with a pitchfork" was Leslie Stephen's view of *Biographia Literaria*. Thomas McFarland's book seems to invite a similar verdict: "this volume has been conceived as a series of dispirations" — that being the coinage, in the Coleridgean manner, to express Romantic ideas of incompleteness, fragmentation and ruin, what he rather grandly calls "the dispirating triad".

Actually, the third term gives a misleading emphasis to the title of the book, which has relatively little to say about ruin and virtually nothing, pace the blurb, about ruins. Ruin implies a previous condition, something that once was whole; but *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin* deals much less than you might expect with the sense of the past. It is really about a different matter, incompleteness, especially Coleridge's incompleteness and in particular the incompleteness of his *magnum opus*, which Professor McFarland is currently engaged in editing. Of course, ruin also carries a sense of self-destruction (as in "blue" or "mother's ruin") which might well be applied to Coleridge; and the Romantic mind in general was always on the verge of regarding the present as "a ruin of the past's possibilities": the chapter called "The Significant Group: Wordsworth's Fears in Solitude" shows the poet struggling "amid the ruins of his earlier confidence in social man". But when in his introduction McFarland remarks, "The Gothic Church to which Wordsworth compared his life-work is no less a ruin than the heap of West Country stone called Tintern Abbey", we are justified in suspect-

ing that the Ruin of the title is a bit of rhetorical colour somewhat emotively and carelessly thrown in.

Fragmentation is our subject, and the extended introduction is a fascinating if ultimately rather over-determined survey of Romantic examples of fragmented work and of Romantic thoughts on the fragmentary, on the fleeting, on the finite and the infinite. As McFarland reminds us, his earlier meditation on Romanticism, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition*, stressed the prevalence of systematic concerns in the Romantic epoch. Retrospection, Coleridge's desire to encompass everything within the one net, was the key word there. The present book is not a retrospection, but a "necessary complement". It asks philosophically "how can a fragment be identified as a fragment unless there is also the conception of a whole from which it is broken off?" While contemplating various aspects of Wordsworth and Coleridge, it aims to show the interpenetration of poetry and philosophy, and culminates in a theory of transcendence as the ultimate goal of all imaginative activity. Life is seen in Heidegger's formulation as a condition of *ständige Unvollständigkeit*, continuing incompleteness. Coleridge's philosophy and Wordsworth's poetry strive to overcome it, or at least to compensate for such fragmentation, but although they may approach places and horizons far beyond the ordinary world and go some way towards temporarily restoring an idea of wholeness, in the end "the only wholes encountered in experience are themselves fragments". But at least a glimpse of higher truth has been gained: "the only true whole is a transcendently constituted whole."

This conclusion is not arrived at organically; as already noted, McFarland draws attention to the mimetic nature of his book. "Its Coleridgean table of contents", he remarks, "is designedly jagged, and its various chapters . . . are at the same time deliberately fragmentary and out-

nomous in formal conception." A sound enough principle of critical decorum is at work, though it produces some comically self-regarding notions. He quotes an engaging notion from Friedrich Schlegel: "A fragment must be like a small work of art, be quite separated from the surrounding world and complete in itself like a hedgehog", and states that two of his chapters — which he calls leading places — "are designed to be incommensurate to a conventionally unitive reading".

This kind of prose, which crops up from time to time, is presumably a bit of harmless sub-Coleridgean fun. But the reader's sympathy is more severely tested by a statement made a few pages further on: "In truth, one way of viewing this book might be to see it as a prose embodiment of that displaced form of the 'greater ode' that M. H. Abrams has termed the 'greater Romantic lyric' — followed by talk of 'the unevenness, the mass, and at the same time the unity claimed both by this volume and its poetic analogues'. The volume hints not the slightest resemblance in form to the musical meditative drolling structure of a Romantic ode or a Conversation Poem — as Abrams's meditation on Romanticism, *Natural Supernaturalism*, does. To make the comparison, McFarland's book doesn't seem to me to be a critical work of that order. All the same, and despite local irritations, it is an impressive, thought-provoking study. If it comes too far forward in the current transatlantic mode of aggrandizing the business of criticism, it is nevertheless unintelligible — though it is brazenly hard going because its range of reading and reference has such width and density.

In fact *Romanticism and the Form of Ruin* is much more straightforwardly coherent than its author suggests. Five of its nine chapters have already been published as separate articles or pieces ("Coleridge's Anxiety" for example); but they all hold together, like those of many other

books composed in the same way. And they are further connected by an expression of intellectual personality. They don't quite constitute "sketches of my literary life and opinions", the terms in which Coleridge qualified *Biographia Literaria*; they are more ordered and much less personal than that. But a virtue of the book is that it refers its arguments to the world outside it ("So much for the Jacobin mania of our own era"). Many such passing opinions or viewpoints are extremely tendentious but, shapings of the unregenerate mind" though they may be, they provide an appropriately Coleridgean indication of the difficulty — what some of his best early poetry explored — of relating poetic to social and political concerns. If the academic teacher and scholar are likely, at certain points in the academic year, to utter "Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement", these sentiments are often, in the Horatian pun Charles Lamb applied to that poem, "proper for a sermon"; but in this case they are justified partly by the fact that Coleridge himself delivered sermons and anyway by what they add to the texture of an already complicated book.

Coleridge as Christian philosopher is the hero of it all. McFarland deals sympathetically and penetratingly with the *magnum opus* on elusive, purely ideal entity (if never got written) which nonetheless colours everything that Coleridge wrote. He explains and defends Coleridge's enormous production of dull and flawed prose.

Because of Coleridge's very special neurotic situation . . . the provisional nature of his prose writing actually allowed him a certain achievement that the ultimate demands of his poetry did not . . . By displacing the hope of classical status onto the conception of *magnum opus*, he was enabled to produce casual and *ad hoc* writing that, imperfect though it is, nevertheless among the treasures of our language.

The disarray of the *Biographia* "dictated by the intensity of the *magnum opus*". The task of the great work was to assert "Christianity the true Philosophy" (a title announced by Coleridge in 1814) and to defend the Christian God against Spinozism and against the materialistic philosophy of process that eventuated in Darwinism.

The other great work of English Romanticism which failed to get written, Wordsworth's *The Recluse*, was, at least in Coleridge's and Thomas McFarland's view, to have been a version of the *magnum opus*. McFarland, in his chapters both on "The Synthesis of Coleridge and Wordsworth" and on "Problems of Style", explains the failure as deriving from the estrangement of the two men. Though the case is obviously not quite so simple as that, he rightly insists on the urgency of Wordsworth's dependence on Coleridge in preparing to write the great philosophical poem: "I am very anxious to have your notes for the Recluse. I cannot say how much importance I attach to this."

McFarland's treatment of Wordsworth is at its most interesting when it is nearest to Coleridge, but it seems excessive to claim that "Wordsworth was not a poet of major significance before he came under Coleridge's influence" and that "he was never a poet of major significance after their break". His comments on style are forthright and useful, though in such a subjective area, while you may agree that the "six years' Darling of a pigmy size" in the *Immortality Ode* is an embarrassing false note, you may wonder at McFarland's complaint about the repetition of the word "Forlorn" in Keats's *Nightingale Ode*: "what led him to this disparaging anadiplosis?" What indeed? To be fair, McFarland supplies a convincing answer; and throughout *Romanticism and the Forms of Ruin* his characteristic inelegance always provides a full and rewarding content.

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commentary

Water under the bridge

By Gavin Stamp

London Delicately 1750 to 1900
Museum of London

It requires a certain imaginative effort to visualize the actual appearance of buildings in, say, the seventeenth century when confronted by prints by Hollar or Kip. Valuable though such images are as architectural and topographical records, the distorted perspective, the graphic conventions and the use of a hard engraved line all militate against a convincing suggestion of reality. This is particularly true of the oldest prints of London. The extraordinary interest and beauty of the city that has gone – the tight, rambling picturesque remains of old London, the City skyline created by Wren, the elegant formality of the newer West End – are more hauntingly preserved for us by Victorian photographs, the earliest of which date from 1839.

Paradoxically, however, by the time photography was invented, prints and watercolours were being produced whose sophistication and accuracy convey the character of British towns and cities almost as well as any photograph – sometimes better. The quality of the English topographical watercolour tradition is, perhaps, most generally associated with Romantic landscapers – by Cotman, Cozens or Turner – but a large number of watercolour artists turned their attention to urban subjects and have left a large number of paintings which are of great beauty and considerable topographical interest.

The founding of the Royal Academy in 1769 improved the status of watercolour painting and topographical work was further encouraged by the great demand for prints, particularly of the new buildings and other great changes effected in London by John Nash after the Napoleonic Wars. Topographical watercolours were reproduced by lithography or aquatint and superb prints were made, such as those by Thomas Shepherd in James Elmes's *Metropolitan Improvements of 1828* or those by Pugin and Rowlandson in Ackerman's *Microcosm of London*, 1808–10.

Everything dandy

By Frances Spalding

Gilbert and George
Whitechapel Gallery

Gilbert and George are self-styled "living sculptures" whose work over the last decade has involved them in continual performance. They first came to fame with a "singing sculpture" in which, with faces and hands glued to simulate bronze, they mimed to a tape of the Flanagan and Allen song "Underneath the Arches", the lyrics declaring their aim to "dream our dreams away". At the same time they issued a message: "Gilbert and George, the sculptors, are walking along a new road. They left their little studio with all the tools and brushes, taking with them only some music; gentle smiles on their faces and the most serious intentions in the world."

These intentions, authorized "dance sculpture", "interview sculpture", "musical sculpture", "philosophy sculpture" and the like. They also led to the making of various objects – environmental drawings, paintings, postcard sculptures, books, videotapes and "photo-places". These last have been praised as their most distinctive contribution and are the subject of a retrospective that fills the Whitechapel Art Gallery until August 16.

Photo-places wallpaper the downstairs gallery from floor to ceiling. The dramatic blow-ups, synthetic dyes and grid-like divisions create an effect of stained glass, turning the gallery into a modern cathedral, as the artists themselves have observed. The banking-up of imagery, fondness for flowers, use of repetition and techniques more often found in advertising remind one of Andy Warhol: his "Electric Chair", rinsed in red dye, may have inspired certain of the recent works in which, behind a glaze of colour, one discovers the hustling crowds and ragged corners of East End streets. As a whole the show progresses from nostalgia to megallomania, from understated show to the vehement and depressive. There is little gentleness now in the artists' fierce exposure of intercity life and its fears and discontent.

Only their detachment remains unchanged. At a time when casualness in dress was *de rigueur*, they put on old-fashioned suits – "the responsibility suits of our art" – and cultivated the image of the stiff-upper-lip English gentleman. They posed in fields and under trees hung with blossom, in an ironic expose of the English love of nature. With (as they said) "specialized embarrassment", they upheld smart dress, politeness, Art, Nature, and Tradition. It seemed an amusing reaction against hippies, a "momentary gesture, paradoxically dependent on the fact

that it was totally unbelievable. Yet their flippant immorality was utterly serious. Like Warhol, they adopted a negative stance which ensured objectivity: their spectacular role charging the outside world with positive meaning. Offset by their passivity, everything became art, a "continuous sculpture". Meanwhile their joint identity gave them an unusual power. "It becomes," they admit, "like a fortress, much bigger than one person."

The photo-places begin by documenting their lives in snapshot form. As they develop they grow in size and coherence, and in technical sophistication. They have now attained a formula made up of rectangular panels, the thin black frames creating a grid of lines over the total work. This grid plays an important formal role: it unifies and divides, binding together collaged elements at the same time as it encourages stark juxtapositions – blossom with tower blocks; the destitute with the tailored Gilbert and George.

Some of the earliest exhibits document the "drinking sculptures" performed in Mass's Bulls Wine Bars in the City of London. The photographs, occasionally tilted like a glass, use misty focus and fragmentation to convey a sense of inebriation – more satire on the art world. Subsequent photo-places catch them collapsed on the floor, amid empty bottles

In love and war

By David Nokes

Trollius and Cressida
Aldwych Theatre

Terry Hands has presented us with a production of *Trollius and Cressida* seen from the perspective of Thersites: "Lechery, lechery, still wars and lechery: nothing else holds fashion." We are offered a cartoon strip of grotesque images, crude, glaring and spectacular. Troy is a doomed city of jaded sybarites. Effete youths in satin tunics, chiffon veils and blond perms expend their listless energies in buggery and darts. The barbed wire that surrounds the city is interwoven with the lattice work of the gates, suggesting the enhancement that danger gives to pleasure.

Meanwhile the Greeks in their trenches are sad, slow, broken men. Their macho exploits are all things of the past, and they trudge around in black leather, relieving their frustrations in tired and cruel barracks-room rivalries. That front-line cliché, the lone harmonica, is used to sentimentalize their boredom and disillusionment. They are caught in a war of attrition for which no one now remembers, or cares about, the cause. Old Nestor (Oliver Ford Davies), bant double and supported on stunted crutches under his massive shield, appears as a forlorn crustacean, washed up on this alien shore. His immobility makes a fine contrast with the skipping, mincing steps of Pandarus (Tony Church) in Troy, an old queen resplendent in pink robes and twirling a parasol.

But these are caricatures, which pay more attention to the surface than to the subtleties of the play. And there is a high price to pay for it all. Ajax (Terry Wood) is played in *Monty Python* fashion as a roaring head-banger. This is very funny, until one is faced with the problem of crediting Ajax with some dignity and intelligence in his reconciliation scene with Hector. Calhoun, a croaking zombie in a wheel-chair, is just plain wrong. There are no figures of dignity or authority in either

camp. Priam is a spindle-shanked progenitor, ghostly in his white sheet and flowing locks; Agamemnon a shell-shocked martinet, whose words are derided or ignored by all about him. Hector alone (Bruce Purchase), declaring "I must not break my faith", attempts to assert some residual connection between words and actions, motives and deeds.

Far more characteristic of this production is Pandarus's dribbling exclamation, "Words pay no debts, give her dead", and Trollius's contemptuous destruction of Cressida's last letter, "words, words, mere words". It's a version in which words generally are sacrificed to spectacle. Trollius (James Hazeldine) delivers his lines in a high-speed gabble. Our attention is deliberately distracted from the debates in the Greek camp, and from Ulysses' long speeches, by such farcical pieces of business as Agamemnon compulsively popping pills. Nestor slobbering his way through an orange, and Ajax presiding karate on empty ammo-boxes. It's a world in which people prate, but nobody listens. Both sides, in their commitment to thoughtlessness, seem intent on mutually assured destruction.

The most spectacular figure, whose semi-divine presence comes increasingly to dominate the more sombre second half of this riotous and disjointed play, is David Suchet's Achilles. He emerges from his tent as the Mr Universe of the gay message-parlor. He flexes his painted pectorals like a ring-master showing off to his Myrmidons, who appear particularly predatory with their insect-like antennae. He is at once controlled and menacing, cowardly and complacent. It is Achilles who presides over the marvellously balletic battle sequences in which music and lighting combine to bring the pent-up activity of the play to a climax.

Terry Hands has intelligently developed the hints in the text concerning the relationship of Achilles and Patroclus, until it becomes the only physically convincing relationship in the whole play. By contrast, Paris and Helen appear as ageing hedonists, engaged in a jaded ritual, and Trollius and Cressida as naive and romantic adolescents. Whatever view the characters in the play take of the war, they are in fact all caught up in an epic struggle of sexual jealousy and revenge.

In this production, the subject is the war; the love of Trollius and Cressida is relegated to a sideshow. They are victims of the war, and their intermittent appearances demonstrate the disruptive effects of time and appetite on creatures whose morality is as conventionally opposed as their desires. Cressida (Carol Royle) is a bored spoiled child, indulged by her uncle, and tired of being overshadowed by Helen. She loves it when, upon arrival at the Greek front line, she is immediately the centre of attention of a group of war-weary men without women. Trollius is a shallow youth in love with love, for whom both Helen and Cressida appear as "pearls". We are concerned less with the tragedy of these star-crossed lovers than with the process by which Trollius, like Menelaus and Achilles, finds an excuse in sexual jealousy for a nihilism which discovers a less unsatisfactory outlet in mindless acts of violence than in meaningless acts of love.

For much of this production I found myself resisting the crude exaggerations of the imagery, the coarse elements of farce, the denial of tragedy, tenderness, or thoughtfulness. Yet towards the end the interpretation did seem to have made some raw sense of a play whose disparate elements often balance a more sensitive treatment. In the final image of the play, Pandarus bequeathes us his diseases, while hanging on the old barbed wire. It is the continuation of lust by lust.

Greek Tragedy on Film
National Film Theatre

During the last twenty years there have been more than a dozen films inspired by Greek tragedy (several more than by Shakespeare). Derek Jarman's weird *Tempest* was in fact the first for ten years. The National Film Theatre showed admirable enterprise in collecting all these together in its programme for June, along with five or six others remotely related. Happily, the NFT gained access to the Greek *Tainioliki* (Film Archive), a treasure house which Mrs Aglaia Mitropoulos has managed to protect even from the interference of transient political regimes. This brought to London some films which have not, I suspect, been seen before outside Greece.

The most interesting was eleven minutes of *Prometheus Bound* in the ancient theatre at Delphi on May 9, 1927. All the modern Greek productions at Epidaurus and throughout the world have drawn sustenance from this event. Not that it was the first time Greek tragedy had been performed in modern Greece, even in the open. As soon as the "theatre" of Herodes Atticus had been excavated in 1867, a group of students performed *Antigone* with music by Mendelssohn. (The nearby Theatre of Dionysus, where the great tragedies were originally produced, proved on excavation in the 1880s to have been damaged and altered beyond repair, and no plays, so far as I know, have been performed there since antiquity.) Tragedies had been regularly put on in Italian in the ancient theatre at Syracuse since 1914, but in Greece itself before 1927 there were only museum pieces for the dignitaries in the dress circle; there was no living dramatic movement.

The turning point was the "Delphic Idea". The poet Angelos Sikelianos (1884–1951) was a visionary who thought that the world might be saved from rationalism and industrialism by "the female principle", blended with Orphism, Buddhism, Dlooyus, Pindar and Aeschylus. He and his wealthy American wife, Eva Palmer, wanted to set up a university at the navel of the earth, the *Ouphiolos*, Delphi (of the Delphic Idea, but it never again found such substance).

Even on an exceedingly primitive piece of film the snippets are enthralling. A limping Hephaestus rivets Prometheus to a jagged rock against the backdrop of the Peliclios Range and Mount Kirithos. In telling contrast, the loyal and pacific Oceanids dance with graceful simplicity, lo, caught between gentleness and rugged power, rushes off to wander the world, and we bear her voice recede down the ravines. The choreography, the masks, the dolphin-ornamented costumes were all Eva's work. She wore the cloth on her own loom. The eagles are said to have left their eyes on the shining erags, the Phaidriads, to circle over this Prometheus. Zeus, the old tyrant, bedecked with his own crown, is the final image of the play, Pandarus bequeathes us his diseases, while hanging on the old barbed wire. It is the continuation of lust by lust.

The Greek National Theatre was founded in 1930 and soon began regular productions of tragedy. An integral part of it was the drama school, which built up a training in spoken delivery and song, troupe-work and choreography; it also supplied other companies which have grown up. It

commentary

The Delphic Idea and after

By Oliver Taplin

was in 1938 that the National Theatre first put on a performance, Sophocles' *Electra*, at Epidaurus, a site at that time well off the beaten track. Mrs Mitropoulos again produced. Even without sound, the sight of Katina Paxinou clinging to the urn which she thinks houses her dead brother is powerfully stirring (before long Paxinou was to be filming *For Whom the Bell Tolls* in Hollywood). It is curious to see the great auditorium less than a quarter full for that historic occasion. There has been a festival there every summer since 1954, and it is rarely that fewer than 10,000 people are gathered there nowadays. Those who have been fortunate enough to get to a performance will know that the great majority of the audience are not tourists or intellectuals but



"Ode on the Genus, II", a print by Wilhelm Lehmbruck (1881–1919) being sold at Sotheby's today.

ordinary Greeks who have converged in a horde of buses. It is a live popular tradition.

A tragedy was filmed in its entirety during public performance at Epidaurus in 1961: Sophocles' *Electra* again. It is not a technically distinguished feat of photography, but it gives some idea of the accomplishments of the National Theatre and of the atmosphere of its performances, down to the clapping of the Epidaurians. The play is built on the varied passions of one woman, and Anna Synodinou's performance pulls its audience into a vortex of anguish and exultation (though Orestes is played by the same actor as in 1938, and the camera ruthlessly turns to Orestes' *Electra* complaints about Orestes' long delayed vengeance). Her slow, full movements are of weight and control, above all in her voice – her control of pitch, timbre, pace and volume – that grips even those with no knowledge of modern Greek.

Another stage performance preserved on film is Tyrone Guthrie's *Oedipus Rex* from the 1954 and 1955 seasons at Stratford, Ontario. Guthrie put his actors in grotesque masks and baggy cloaks and gave them claws for hands; his chorus writhes in fogs of frozen carbon dioxide like creatures from the swamps of Traal. Yeats's translation is distinguished only in the lyrics, and I found the highly mannered sing-song delivery rather absurd. My response to the film tallies with Margaret Bleber's to the original performance, which she records in her *History of the Greek and Roman Theatre*: "It had no power to move the audience... The movements were rigid and stylized in the extreme... The theatre was too small for such a severe and gigantic mounting." The camera magnified these distortions. Yet some of Guthrie's public were highly enthusiastic. I suspect that they were impressed in the way that they might be by witnessing the dances and rituals of some primitive tribe, though with no notion of their significance.

Guthrie derived a spurious authenticity from using masks; but their design, like the rest of the production, came from his strange imagination

rather than from any textbook. The 1961 French film of Aeschylus' *Perseus* by Jean Prat, by contrast, suffered from too much deference to scholars. He had read that early tragedy was like an oratorio, so his chorus scarcely moves, even during the ghost-raising scene, but firmly stands its ground through interminable swelling discords. The costumes, obedient to the book, are "statuesque" – in fact the whole cast looks and moves like the ghost of the Commendatore.

Sophocles' *Antigone*, directed by George Tzavellas, and Euripides' *Electra*, by Michael Cacoyannis, were both issued in 1961, and both starred in little-known actresses, Irene Pappas. *Antigone* turned from the theatre into Hollywood epic. Horses gallop through monumental gateways.

His energies were enhanced by those of two others: Mikis Theodorakis who wrote the music, and the actress Irene Pappas. On one level this film marked the liberation of Greek tragedy from the theatre into the self-sufficient, non-biodegradable world of film. At the same time, this could never have happened without the modern Greek idea: a tradition begun at Delphi in 1927. The stylized expressiveness, the disciplined fluidity of grouping, the techniques for conveying emotional intensity through voice and physique – all these were owed to the theatre.

It was ten years before Cacoyannis turned again to Greek tragedy with his *Trojan Women* (he had been responsible in the meantime for *Zorba the Greek*). In 1971 the Colonos were strutting in Greece, the Americans were slaughtering and being slaughtered in Vietnam, and Euripides' play about the futility of both victory and defeat was more than ever topical. The film was made in Spain, the dialogue was in English, the stars were international. Once more, Pappas petrified the audience with her performance of Helen, fatal not so much for her beauty as for her powerful spirit. Everyone will remember Vanessa Redgrave's throat stricken to screams when Andromache is told that her little son is to be thrown from the walls. But there is nothing memorable, good or bad, about Katherine Hepburn's performance as Hecuba, the betrayed and humiliated queen of Troy, the role which runs through the whole of *Trojan Women*. The catalogue of horror somehow lacks particularity.

Why was this by far the least successful of Cacoyannis's "trilogy" of Euripidean films? The suspicion lurks that it was partly because the dialogue was in English, losing – to foreign ears – the passionate obscurity of Greek. This complaint is not as mischievous as it might seem. Not only do we lack in the English-speaking theatre a tradition of intense stylized acting, but we have in real life no accepted mode of uninhibited lamentation. Most cultures have their traditional expressions of grief. Margaret Alexiou has demonstrated (in *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*) the continuity of the *mbolagi*, the ritual lament, from ancient to modern Greece. In some areas it is even improvised from traditional motifs: anyone who has come under the spell of Patrick Leigh Fermor's *Mosai* will not forget the Maniot *mbolagi* for the English airman: "Such a bright star should never have fallen to the ground..." Instead, the English stifles distress or are embarrassed at its expression. This gives the acting of tragedy in Greek an incalculable advantage.

For his *Iphigenia* (1976), Cacoyannis returned to Greek and to Greece – it looks as though it might have actually been filmed at Aulis. Pappas, and Theodorakis also, seemed rejuvenated by re-establishing contact with their native soil. Euripides died with

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commentary

his *Iphigenia in Aulis* unfinished, but it seems to have meant an uncomfortable uncertainty to hang over the desirability of the Greek "Jolly war" for which Iphigenia gives her life. Caccyanni's simplifies this. His Machiavellian Odysseus and the Aytollah Calchus conspire to ensure the sacrifice. The wind was beginning to blow in any case, but the blood lust of the army had to be titillated.

Caccyanni's presentation of the many-headed monster the army (which is, of course, behind the scenes in Euripides) is most effective. A sea of gleaming torsos, a swell of brutal dogmats, sweat, boredom, the suppressed violence of impatience. Against this background the finest scenes of the film are private and individual (and Euripidean). Tatiana Papamarkou as Iphigenia really does seem to be about fifteen, on the border between ingenuousness and grace. Her guileless yet mature pleas are indubitable. "It is sweet to see the light: do not make me see the underworld! I was the first to call you father, the first you called child..." Costi Kazakos as Agamemnon meets the challenge, tortured by the trust and closeness of his daughter, humiliated and defensive before his wife, yet at the same time a public figure, a leader of men, and Papas gutters to herself all the bitterness and desperation of misused wives over the centuries as she pleads, "do not force me to become a god!" At the very end, as she departs from the shore at Aulis without her daughter, the rising wind blows her black hair across her face like snakes, the snakes of an avenging Fury.

Electra and Iphigenia are to my mind far the best films yet made out of Greek tragedy; but they are not, I suspect, nearly so well known as Pasolini's *Edipo Re* (1967) and *Medea* (1971). For cinematographic virtuosity, for the exquisite juxtaposition of the beautiful and the repulsive, Pasolini may be supreme; but what about the films as tragedy, or as the concentrated portrayal of human suffering and its place in the multiverse? *Medea* touches on anthropology but not on *anthropology*; it dabbles with patterns of culture, but when it comes to personal relationships it is child. *Medea* (Maria Callas's only film performance) hovers at a brooding, priestly inscrutability, but what does she feel or think about Jason? Wistful glances at naked limbs are not enough. And there is nothing to make us feel that she cares at all about her children: they are child-performers, uncomfortable in the presence of a stranger, a great star. Euripides persuades us into circumstances where a mother might butcher her own children, and makes us feel them.

Sophocles' Oedipus is driven by the will to know. He does not see how painful knowledge will be, but that is because he is human rather than because he is stupid. Pasolini's Oedipus is a moody, slow-witted man driven primarily by his Oedipus complex. (Jean-Paul Vernant's demonstration, in *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, that Freud has no light to throw on Sophocles' play seems to me conclusive.) The best minutes of the film are at the beginning and the end, set in contemporary Italy. Everything in between is Africanized (Ihus, for example, the Delphic Oracle is a gaggle of which doctors squating under a single tree in the desert). Is Pasolini making profound points about cultural relativity and "Ispensic sauvage", or is it rather that he was fascinated with photographing the Moroccan landscape and its inhabitants? The simplicity and laicization which made *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* so direct and urgent lose their point here. *Edipo* is after all *Re*: to become the lowest of men he has first to be the highest, the brightest. (Yet I have to concede that Pasolini's film is more thought-provoking than a worthy but lifeless version of *Oedipus* made by a British company, directed by Philip Saville, at Dodona in 1967.)

I am aware of only one film of Greek tragedy which was not trawled by the National Film Theatre's net. In 1971, Vassilis Fotopoulos, the stage designer, made a film of *Orestes* (mentioned in Mel Schuster's *The Contemporary Greek Cinema*). It would have been interesting to see it, if only because it was shot in Miami, a haunted land of towers and terraces which fifty years have turned into a crowded, redemptive, hidden society to a depopulated promontory. Some of the films which were shown, on the other hand, had nothing to do with Greek tragedy. Nikos Nikolaidis's *Euripides* (2017) (1975), for instance, is a purely personal fantasy. Miklos Jancsó's *Elektra Szerelem* (*Elektra My Love*, for some reason Englished as *Elektra*) is based on a play by László Gárdonyi which owes nothing detectable to Greek tragedy. We are given beautiful photography of what seems to be a folk-dance form, of buxom Magyar mules and of horsemen in slightly misadvised folk-shirts, but the content, which is pure political symbolism, seems bland and incoherent.

When films such as these were included it might seem odd to have omitted a work which does have connections with Greek tragedy and is one of the best new films for many years: Theodoros Angelopoulos's *The Travelling Players* (*O Thiasos*), first seen in 1975 - though I take it that it was because the National Film Theatre currently has a season devoted entirely to Angelopoulos.

Some have found *The Travelling Players* tedious, undisciplined, pretentious and naive. I readily forgive all its faults in return for its openness and power. For four hours without break the film traces the fortunes of a troupe of entertainers, though not always in chronological order, from the pre-war fascist regime of General Metaxas down to the election of the extreme right-wing government of Field-Marshal Papagos in 1952. The com-

Myths of force

By T. A. Shippey

Clash of the Titans
Empire Cinema, Leicester Square

Excalibur
Studio 4 Cinema, Oxford Circus

Myth, according to C. S. Lewis, is that kind of story which can instantly be recognized as signifying something by anyone who hears even a plot-summary, no matter how attenuated or halting. This thesis is instantly disproved by the new MGM film *Clash of the Titans*, which manages to rehandle Perseus and Andromeda without getting a flicker of the numinous out of sacrificed maiden, sea-monster, cruel crawling foam or anything else, despite an illustrious cast including Laurence Olivier as Zeus and Ursula Andress as a totally redundant, if stilted, Aphrodite.

Much of the trouble comes from a variant of the Lewis thesis. This is a myth (so the producers seem to have told themselves). So you've got to have respect, you can't just get on with the heroes and monsters, you have to have some background - Perseus as son of Danae and Zeus, Zeus as incorrigible philanderer, jealousy between Zeus and Hera over the fates of their mortal sons, Hera's son Kalibos as the murderer of the herd of winged horses, Pegasus as last survivor of said herd, and so on and so on, very much in the style of the post-Homeric poets who took the Fall of Troy back to Leda's egg, instead of starting with a bang like the *Iliad*.

The result of this didactic interest is that many of the characters, and all the Olympians, seem to be there to pass on information, while much of the information has to be repeated several times. Ammon: "The helmet of the gods can make you invisible". Perseus, wonderingly, and miking the scene pretty hard: "Invisible?" Ammon, with genial tolerance: "Invisible". If the story Beverly Cross was writing had just been made up, you feel he would have driven on harder. But weighed down

pany's act is the Pyramus-and-Thisbe romance of Gollu the shepherdess and her swain Tasso, very tragic myth. But their performances are for ever interrupted by the secret police rounding up the leaguers. In 1939, the Italian invasion in 1940, the German occupation in 1941, the British "occupation" in 1944 (thoroughly condemned and satirized), and finally the civil war of 1947-49; a harrowing decade from which Greece emerged, in Angelo-poulos's eyes, an authoritarian monarchy, a source of loot for capitalism, a satellite and playground for richer nations.

But while Tasso and Gollu never manage to reach their union in death, the bloody tragedies of real life are carried right through to their descendants. The second man in the troupe betrays its leader to the Germans, takes over, and marries the wife. Her daughter dedicates herself to waiting for revenge; and eventually in 1945 her brother - Orestes - comes down out of the hills, where he is a communist guerrilla, to shoot his mother and her Aegisthus on stage in mid-performance. Eventually he is captured, and, unlike the Orestes of ancient tragedy, executed. Judgment is passed on him, however, at his burial, in one of the finest sequences of the film: as the earth is shovelled on his coffin the seven surviving members of the troupe stand and applaud, not just for a few seconds but for a full minute. Orestes has given the performance of his life.

Angelopoulos has turned Greek tragedy into the tragedy of Greece. *The Thiasos* (which means more strictly the "troupe" or "company") symbolizes the Greek people. Every character

and event stands for some faction or attitude or event in the turbulent history of the time. But what makes this film so much better than the comparable allegories of Jancsó or Pasolini is that it also succeeds on a personal level: each member of the troupe is a fully convincing individual. Thus, as Elektra leads Orestes through the dark patrolled streets to revenge, while she is the ordinary people of Greece hacking the partisans in the struggle against the collaborators with fascism, she is also a woman, tormented by loyalty to her dead father and hatred of his lascivious betrayers. The fusion of the solid and abstract makes an emotional and intellectual impact which is that of tragedy, in a way that is true of very few films.

Angelopoulos stands out like Poseidon from the New Ripple in the contemporary Greek cinema. A movement of young Turks (so to speak) gathered strength in reaction against the Colonels, and has produced some interesting films in the last ten years. They are very serious and very Greek. To some extent they define themselves by the repudiation of the image of the Greek purveyed by Dassin's *Never on a Sunday* (1960) and Caccyanni's *Zorba the Greek* (1964) - fun-loving, ignorant, impulsive: an image taken up by the package-tour brochures with their Aphrodite Beach Hotels and Zorba's Discos.

Yet the only film from a young director with declared tragic ancestry is Costas Ferris's *Prometheus* (*Second Person Singular* 1975), a self-indulgent stream of whimsy, and a far cry from the Delphic idea. There seems to have been a rejection of ancient Greece as a symbol of conservatism and pedantry.

By rival authority, he has let details get in the way, as if assuming that (like the obscurities in Scripture) they must mean something or they wouldn't be there.

Of course *Clash of the Titans* does mean something, in modern terms, but its myth or meaning is actually a tawdry one for a consumer society. The real influence on it, I suspect, is *Star Wars*, which in some respects is asked assiduously. In both films we have a hero selected for engaging good looks, like a beefy kid next door; a mentor who is wise and knowledgeable but also faintly comic, like the older generation as seen by teenagers; a heroine who poses no great sexual challenge even to the insecure (Judi Bowker's nude scene as Andromeda is terribly tasteful); and an overruling Force to assure its audience that Life really is good hands.

Both films insist furthermore that heroes win through because they're so sincere, that bullies are always cowards, and that monsters just have to be stood up to. *Clash of the Titans*, then, trembles on the edge of Noddylism, and snatches at euteness. The imitation of *Star Wars* comes through most fully in Bubba, the brave little clockwork owl sent down by Athena to show Perseus the way; he flutters and warbles in a tone all too derivative from Artoo Deetoo. The breath of Kraken knocks him down - free he recovers; and Pegasus flies free into the wild blue yonder; and only monsters die. This film even brings in Charon, the boatman of the Styx, that sour ferryman whom poets tell of: yet it contains no fear, remains the product of a culture (American culture) with no attitude in mortality.

Excalibur treats its source material (Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*) more boldly and far more successfully. The adaptor, Rosko Pallenberg, has decided what he thinks King Arthur means nowadays and to us, and has then pruned, spliced and rationalized ruthlessly, in obedience to a single conception. The *sen* that emerges may still have been in the story from the beginning; but it is something new just the same. Powerful stories, we realize, can metamorphose very

It is inevitable that modern Greek culture should have a love-hate relationship with antiquity: such a past is an innumerable burden, impossible to live up to or to live without. Elytis writes "They gave me Greek as my language, 'The poor house on Homer's shores', but Selenis's image for the past is more oppressive - 'I woke up with a marble head in my hands'. The film-makers should, however, be able to feel more independent than the poets; and they have the vigorous theatrical tradition to tap. It is encouraging to learn that the fine tragic actress Aspasia Papanthassiou has recently set up a company of travelling players which performs ancient and modern plays throughout Greece in any available hall, playing-field or *plakia*.

Most of the films gathered by the National Film Theatre have been derived from the Oedipus and Elektra dramas. It is curious that certain other Greek tragedies have not inspired any cinema, not even those which offer some sort of timeless opposition between culture and nature, society and individual: Euripides' *Bacchae*, for example, or his *Hippolytus*. (I do not count Dassin's *Phaedra*, 1961, which does not begin to grapple with Hippolytus' asceticism, his rejection of carnality for the purity of the "uncut meadow".) Or consider the possibilities of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. Personal and political, means and ends, ambition, integrity, compromise, disease, hatred, friendship, a false world with intimations of a true one. All these "modern" preoccupations are given physical particularity in a wild setting of sea, crags and shore. Angelopoulos's metamorphosis of *Philoctetes* might awaken the dead.

knights, the boy from the kitchens, like Arthur promoted with sudden magnanimity from the ranks. By contrast Mordred in his obscenely nipped Gucci armour has the petulant face and manners of the aristocrat by birth. His mother Morgana (Helen Mirren), uses the Charm of Creation, another Pallenberg idea, exploitatively, without Merlin's finer ecological sense. Both speak haughty Received Pronunciation English, quite unlike Merlin's faintly Celtic accent and the very distinct West Country burr of Arthur (played by Nigel Terry, who does an excellent job of suggesting change and growth).

Does it work? Watching a film one little time to brood and (unlike *Clash of the Titans*) *Excalibur* does not seem to have a book-of-the-film coming along in support. However, one point in it which everyone can grasp is about the attractions of violence. William Hobbs, as Fight Arranger, has done a magnificent job of recreating the tactics of armoured warfare, where weight and strength count for more than finesse or speed, and where you can never be sure who is behind the other visor. In such circumstances it must be a great help to lose your temper. And one after another, Leodegrance, Arthur, Lancelot, Mordred fall to the last-like temptation of wrath: Uther's armoured rape of Igraine only makes the point graphic. Restraint is pain, excess is pleasure. That is why the king should not be maimed, must be whole enough for desire, and yet hold back...

The modernity of this film, which makes Merlin (Nicol Williamson) a scientist, and the Grail an object without religious significance, is very striking, but in the end neither licentious nor inappropriate. As a film *Excalibur* corresponds to T. H. White's *Once and Future King*. Bold, novel, free with the letter and true to the spirit, it is a response to an ancient story which pays the *Morte d'Arthur* the compliment of believing it can adapt to circumstances Sir Thomas Malory never thought of. This, surely, is the way to work. *Clash of the Titans*, for all its care, assumed it was dealing with a dead issue. *Commentary continues on page 823.*

to the editor

Dostoevsky and the Jews

Sir, - In his review of David L. Goldstein's *Dostoevsky and the Jews* (July 3) Robert Alter refers to the "Jewish fireman" who witnesses Svidrigailov's suicide at the end of *Crime and Punishment*. Not fireman, surely, but guardman; more specifically one of the imperial guardmen on ceremonial duty in St Petersburg, who wore an "Achilles helmet". Among those conscripted into military colonies by Arakcheev, the evil genius of the last years of Alexander's reign, were numbers of young Jewish boys from the pole. There have been some doubts that Dostoevsky's guardman would originally have been one of these unfortunate.

One should never underestimate the range and potency of this novel's human, a solvent of every sort of crackpot or disingenuous belief which the doctrine Dostoevsky may have held. This is a signal instance. Svidrigailov looks absolutely OK - blue-eyed, flaxen-haired, the ideal orthodox Slav - but in him there is only a repulsive emptiness and boredom. He is the accused and wandering Jew, at last going off "to America", as he says, raising the revolver to his head. Meanwhile the real Jew in his imperial Russian uniform makes the proper pronunciation of nationalistic orthodoxy: "You can't do that here here".

There is nothing ironic or symbolic about the episode. It is extremely and obviously funny, and thus humane. Nor does it matter if Svidrigailov is intended to be a Polish-Lithuanian landowner, another of Dostoevsky's dislikes. It makes it all the funnier.

JOHN BAYLEY.

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'The Unmasking of Medicine'

Sir, - I am Kennedy could hardly have asked for a better vindication of the criticisms of the medical profession made in his Reith Lectures than J. F. Watkins's testy criticism (June 26). Kennedy's first criticism was that judgments regarded as purely "medical" often involve judgments of value in the making of which a medical training confers no special expertise, eg. decisions to grant or refuse abortions, to switch off or continue life-support machines, to classify people as mentally ill. This Watkins regards as a puerile resentment of the authority conferred by "expertise and rationality", thus missing the point entirely - yet Watkins himself muses that "The problem in defining mental illness is that... it is not easy... to be sure what the term 'ill' means in this context", and that "What is certain" is that members of society are distressed by "the patient's" actions and words and turn to "experts" for help.

Kennedy's second, related, criticism is that medicine is concerned with scientific research to such an extent that insufficient attention and resources are devoted to means of avoiding "illness" in the first place - for example, the high rate of perinatal mortality among the working classes suggests that it might be feasible to devote greater resources to such unglamorous work as is done by social workers, at the expense, if necessary, of treatment which is far more expensive in terms of the lives likely to be saved, but in which the medical profession, because of its institutional values, has a far greater interest, such as heart transplants. Watkins's reply that if "a piece of equipment, costing a million pounds, could help to alleviate the lot of only one patient every ten years", then the doctor must get that equipment. demonstrates the point perfectly. Watkins's spluttering conclusion, describing Kennedy's work as absurd, trivial and immature, suggests that

Kennedy may at least have succeeded in rounding the intellectual arrogance of a profession which claims that "a mere layman could not possibly discuss intelligently the place of Medicine in Society".

ROBERT REED.

Balliol College, Oxford OX1 3BJ.

W. H. Auden

Sir, - I'm surprised to find Peter Porter (July 3) suggesting that "none of us" can have seen Auden's "Tommy" did his mother told him "verse before. Surely 'most of us' who have read John Fuller's *Auden's Guide* - which Porter recommends elsewhere in his interesting review of Humphrey Carpenter's new biography - are well acquainted with that particular squib from the juvenilia.

JOHN MOIR.

11 Hill Street, St Albans, Hertfordshire.

Ivan the Terrible

Sir, - It is a pity that your reviewer, Kyril FitzGibbon, does not quote with accuracy (June 5). He left out an important word in my opening sentence, in my book *Ivan the Terrible*, and introduced an example of tautology in another quotation. I began my biography with this sentence: "The Russians spare their tyrants. They kill only those monarchs that lack barbarity." Your reviewer omitted the word "monarchs", thus impairing its meaning.

On another page I referred to "religious and ideological" motives for expansion. Mr FitzGibbon altered this, in his review, to "religious and theological".

His criticism concerning etymology was completely unfounded. If he asks a Russian, or consults a dictionary, he will find that all the Russian words I translated into English are correctly rendered. And his final comments about the absence of any mention of Russian policy and national interests suggests that he merely dipped into the book, as I deal with these topics in every chapter.

In one detail he was correct. Catherine the Great's war in 1796 was against Persia, not India. Details of Paul's campaign against India, that is the British, whom he expected to fight in Afghanistan, are given by the historians of that period, as your reviewer will discover.

He really should not blame a writer for the content of his quotations, as if he were making them up as I went along.

FRANCIS CARR.

20 Park Street, Brighton.

Horace Walpole

Sir, - It seems to me that William Crowder's letter (July 3) - preferring that Walpole's correspondence be assigned to an English reviewer - betrays a lamentable chauvinism. Some years ago the *New York Review of Books* did exactly that, and the result was a curious "tribute", which I doubt that Mr Crowder would endorse. In this century, at least, eighteenth-century literary and historical scholarship has been produced, shared, and appreciated on both sides of the Atlantic. My tribute to W. S. Lewis contains no hint that it is confined to American or exiled English admirers. Although expressed in less fulsome terms than Mr Crowder's it reflects the appreciation of readers throughout the English-speaking world. Perhaps Mr Crowder will find some consolation in the fact that I wrote my review in South Kensington.

ROBERT HALSBAND.

The Garrick Club, Garrick Street, London WC2.

Gaelic in the Highlands

Sir, - While I cordially salute James Hunter for his thoughtful review of my book *Scenes from a Highland Life* (June 12), may I gently rebut his assertion that speech I quote is not true to life because West Highlanders are in a tradition of learning English as a foreign language and hence do not speak it with impurities. Certainly it was once true, as he says, that West Highlanders were primarily Gaelic-speaking and learnt and spoke English as a foreign language. But that was all a very long time ago. He says it was "... a generation or two ago...". West Highlanders would say it was at least two, that takes us back to the 1930s, in the time when Gaelic was under the oppression and when, as one of my characters says, children at school were "... strapped mercilessly for speaking Gaelic". It would not be easy to find a teacher in the West Highlands these days, or even in the fairly recent past, who taught English as a foreign language.

A few pockets of mainly older people do survive in the West Highlands who fit Mr Hunter's image, but these are small and fading fast. In villages along the North-West coast, children tell me that their parents will not speak Gaelic to them. *Cannor* is often nearer the truth. Again the ambivalence towards Gaelic and its culture, which I also dealt with in *Scenes from a Highland Life*, undoubtedly contributes to paternal attitudes.

Sad it may be, but the truth is that the once "pure" English diction that Mr Hunter has in mind has been heavily diluted - the result of many cultural influences: travel, sojourns in cities, military service, a wish to assimilate, the influence of "outsider" teachers in local schools, to mention but a few.

RALPH GLASSER.

96/100 New Cavendish Street, London W1M 7PA.

Charles Compton

Sir, - Nigel Cross puts forward the suggestion (June 19) that the presence of a pension was the reason for the decision of Charles Compton, an accomplished artist, to paint for pleasure rather than for livelihood. Provision for family and old age is a constant and not a contemptible preoccupation of mankind, and may well have been a contributory factor; but not the most important. With his evangelical background, this would seem to have been a matter of temperament. Never a robust man, of a gentle, puerile disposition, he may have come to see the bright circle of his youth as tarnished, and to feel that he was not cut out for the Bohemian life, preferring the discipline of office routine relieved by many interests; his domestic life bearing favourable comparison with his contemporaries. Thus he chose a life that can be described as obscure in the sense that it brought him neither fame nor notoriety, but the record of which, even for one year, is of importance to the social historian as a piece of authentic manuscript illuminating the lives of our ancestors.

EUNICE H. TURNER.

The Green, Littlebourne, nr Canterbury, Kent.

Handel

Sir, - Your Commentator (Keith Walker, July 3) asks whether Handel's music was really performed at Queen Anne's court. He must surely know the Ode for the Queen's birthday, which Handel and his poet (Ambrose Philips?) would hardly have written unless a performance was at least expected.

RALPH LEAVIS.

Lincoln College, Oxford OX1 3DR.

"To the editor" is also on page 814, with "Among this week's contributors" and "Author, Author".

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An awareness of delight

By Jonathan Barker

CHARLES TOMLINSON:

The Flood

55pp. Oxford University Press.
£3.95.
0 19 211944 3

The Flood is Charles Tomlinson's tenth book of poems, his first *Relations and Continuities* being published exactly thirty years ago. These ten books contain over four hundred poems. In addition to this output, Tomlinson has since the late 1960s produced printings and graphic works in great profusion. (The only book so far of the graphic works, *Black and White*, 1976, contained small-scale reproductions and there is need of another, larger format volume.)

Tomlinson's work as a poet has developed with a steady, meticulous and steadily consistent assurance. His first book contained only one poem which he felt worth preserving in his *Selected Poems 1951-1974* but that one is recognizably his. It describes a horse-driven float in terms of sound (the horse's hooves breaking "clean and frost-sharp on the untoppled ear") and sight ("The hooves describe an arabesque on space"). Tomlinson went on to produce memorable books at both ends of the 1960s. *Seeing Is Believing* (1960) contains his famous rejection of Symbolism in the poem "Antecedents": "the shut cell of that solitude" is seen as a view of life too subjective to allow accurate contemplation of the outside world. Tomlinson's personal poetic of thinking and feeling with the eye was an attempt to break free from what he saw as the neo-Romantic view of the poet: it was as if he needed to write a poetry which respected objects as things with their own independent life. *The Way of a World* (1969), surely Tomlinson's most impressive single book, combined his passion and respect for language as a means of precisely exploring the world with his equal passion and respect for objects outside ourselves. This produces a masterly title poem: "we grasp the way of a world in the seed, the gull/splayed toiling against the two/Gravities that root and uproot the trees."

The Way In (1974) introduced Tomlinson's personal history with "At Stoke", an autobiographical piece that also provides insight into the poems and the graphic works: "I have lived in a single landscape. Every tone/And text have had for their ground/These beginnings in grey/black". The printed poems had always naturally enough used black ink on white paper, but eventually this colour, or lack of colour, extended to the black gouache of Tomlinson's graphic works. These are executed in aspic black, white and grey and create imaginary worlds and chance relationships between images. The fact that Tomlinson's visual education took place in the industrial landscape of Stoke ("This place the first to seize on my heart and eye/His been their notebook and their history") may not be beside the point here. The sense of his urban roots is stressed in a poem called "The Lagoon" (included in Tomlinson's new book, *The Flood*) on the Gloucestershire countryside: "I still keep the eye of a newcomer/a townsman's eye". Even though he has lived in the countryside for twenty years, his outsider's eye ensures that everything he sees is continually revalued.

Tomlinson's central themes have always been sensation and the mind examining sensations in relation to natural phenomena. Once we grasp this we can see that the chief poetic precursor of Tomlinson is not Wallace Stevens, William Carlos Williams or Giuseppe Ungaretti (although their techniques have influenced him considerably), but the William Wordsworth who talked of nature "feebly watched" and who was able to watch a butterfly for half an hour so as to discover whether it slept or fed.

The Flood is different to the five books which have preceded it in one very noticeable way. Instead of arranging the poems by theme, the book moves apparently chronologically through the poet's travels. The sequence of places seems to be: Gloucestershire, North America, Italy and back to Gloucestershire again. The forms of the poems change with the locations. The Gloucestershire poems are generally longer, utilizing an indeterminate and fluid unrhymed run-on line. The poems set in New Mexico or other parts of the United States tend to be shorter travel snapshots (the titles are often place-names, as in a travel diary), and the topics touched on include the decline of the power of tribal spirits in Jemez, the cries of the eagle dancers at Cochiti, divers at San Francisco, and the noises of the frogs in Poughkeepsie, NY. The poems lead naturally from one to the next, the link being the almost invisible "I" of the poet as he moves from the snow of the first poem through the desert garden in New Mexico to the tributary of the River Severn which dominates the final poems.

These travel poems could possibly be used as evidence to support the traditional complaint (usually made by those who later admit to not having read much of his work) that Tomlinson does not write directly about what Robert Frost called "inner weather". But to Tomlinson whatever happens around him defines his inner nature: he discovers the world through his relationship to it. "Touch taught the body how to go/Through straight places. Nothing too steep/Or narrow now, once mind and muscle/learned to dance their balancings..." Hence Tomlinson's need to record clearly what he sees and experiences without moving directly into the limelight.

The Flood contains a great variety of poems, among them the very personal elegy "For Miriam", the unrhymed prose passage "The Near and the Far", the humorous "Albuquerque", in which a cinema built in the same year as the birth of the poet is being restored - "I am antique already", the poem ends; "Progressive Note", on a musical concert (it is the latest in a series of poems by Tomlinson on music, "the wholly imaginary passion" as he calls it); a narrative poem for Charles Olson; and the strange little poem "Parsnips", which sees parsnips as "this image of perfection". Cézanne commented similarly on carrots; and Cézanne and Tomlinson are alike in their ability to look at familiar things in a new way.

But the best and most essentially Tomlinsonian poems in *The Flood* are those gathered towards the end of the book and set "beside a stream in Gloucestershire", as home is described in a touchingly personal and public poem, "Instead of an Essay", addressed to Donald Davie. Davie,

the first and surely still with Michael Schmidt the best critic and champion of Tomlinson's poems, is called "Brother in a mystery you trace/To God, I to an awareness of delight/Not name". This delight in the act of sensually experiencing the world is an aspect of Tomlinson's poetry which has been curiously understressed by critics.

The title poem is a personal meditation on the night the "stream in Gloucestershire" rose violently during rain and flooded the poet's home. (The cover of the book shows a detail of Leonardo's "The Deluge"). The almost symbolic water of the river, and the stone of the house once "perfectly reconciled" side by side with it, are incongruously mixed when the river floods. Stone, "the image of a constancy", becomes "as porous as a sponge", although "the walls held"; meanwhile the "we" of the poem sleep upstairs, hung "between a dream of fear and the very thing" on which he returned to in the final poem in the book, "The Epilogue". Characteristically "The Flood" ends with the poet's pleasure next morning when he sees his flooded rooms downstairs, where reflections of water and light dance "in whorls on every ceiling" and produce "this vertigo of sunbeams everywhere". Sight overcomes everything else as the poet pauses "to praise the shimmer". Seeing is believing in deed; and daylight enables the poet

to hack down a bank so that water can return to the river.

"The Epilogue" is an extraordinary poem, a rare but not unique example of Tomlinson using the surreal or "so real", as he punningly and tellingly calls it elsewhere. The inner world of imagination is usually the domain of his graphic works, but here chance and dream enter a poem in which the possible death of "Myself and you" under an apocalyptic tidal wave is inverted when the poet wakes from nightmare to the real world and its sounds. "Caught back from epilogue to epilogue" the poem ends - the first epilogue being the possible end of the world, the second and more immediate ending being that of the book. "The Epilogue" is also, of course, the epilogue to the poem "The Flood"; in both it is the world of light, and the sight and sounds of morning, which dismiss fears felt at night.

In his best poems, and I am inclined to include the title poem of his new book among them, Tomlinson achieves the very thing that he once praised John Constable for doing: "for what he saw/Discovered what he was, and the hand - unswayed by the dictation of a single sense - Bodied the accurate and total knowledge in a calligraphy of present pleasure". Pleasure is indeed the word to end on: if not his best book, *The Flood* is certainly one of Tomlinson's most varied and rewarding.

successful poems, there are elsewhere, were personal ones, examining the tensions between the pain of separation from his wife and from normal human living and his open-eyed, unaggressive commitment to the war. He did not speak only for himself. His tender, painful poem "Goodbye" must have haunted many couples separated by events.

The selection is by the poet's widow together with Jeremy Hooker, who contributes a perceptive "Afterword". The layout of the book is cramped and a little distracting, but with publishing in its current state readers must no doubt lower their expectations in this respect, and be grateful merely to see these poems in print once again.

"Psychobiography" is an established critical genre. Roger Poole's *The Unknown Virginia Woolf* provides a sinister example. Paul Delany's book on Lawrence and the Great War is a very persuasive one and Ford, like Conrad (Moser's last subject), particularly invites such treatment. His mixed rationality, his Pre-Raphaelite leanings, his messy, tormented love-affairs, his quarrels (especially with Conrad), his nervous disorders, his war experience, his brilliant editing of the *English Review*, his distortions of his own life, his Catholicism, vanity, scepticism, "sentimental Torism", above all his seeming to stand so expressively for the passing of the Edwardian age: these things are necessarily involved in our reading of his fiction. Especially when so little of it is, in fact, read. The "psychobiographer" may well be in a better position than the textual analyst to explain why Ford spent twenty-four years trying to write *The Good Soldier*, and why so much of what came before and after has been submerged. Of well over seventy books, I suppose that *The Good Soldier*, *Parade's End* (often without *Last Post*), *The Fifth Queen*, *Romania* (written with Conrad), bits of the marvellous travel writing, memoirs and criticism are now all that are widely read. Novels such as *Mr Apollo*, *A Call, Ladies Whose Bright Eyes*, *The New Humpty-Dumpty*, or *Henry for Hugh*, with Ford's poetry, his fairy tales, war-writing and pantomime, are the specialist's or connoisseur's preserve. Thomas Moser reads all of Ford, *con amore*, but he knows very well what some do not.

But even a limited reading of Ford will amply display the polished, minute prose, and his recurrent preoccupations: his romantic feeling for the English landlord class, for Provence, for Catholic medievalism; his tragic belief in idealism and passion; his obsession, like Conrad, with doubles, "secret sharers"; his infirm neurotic heroes and destructive women; his sense that "we mortal millions live alone"; and his longing for peace: "I must have a bit of rest, you know".

Moser's labour of love (he describes his man as "strange, lovable, brilliant, unhappy, joyous, generous and altogether wonderful") is to explain the persistence of these "Fordian" features, and hence Ford's creative imagination. Ford's emergent psychology is formed by the influences of Rossetti ("obsessive concern with passion"), a belief that "passion brings death" and, of Ford's grandfather, Ford Madox Brown (altruism, idealism, manliness: Ford's "other ideal", Ford's father, Hueffer, who called his

The Good Soldier out of uniform

By Hermione Lee

THOMAS C. MOSER:

The Life in the Fleets of Ford Madox Ford

340pp. Princeton University Press.
\$29.50.
0 691 06445 8

"I don't know that an analysis of my own personality matters at all to this story," says Dowell at the start of Part III of *The Good Soldier*, a moment after accounting for himself with "it is as if one had a dual personality". The two remarks are crucial: of course Dowell's psychology "matters" in "the saddest story", indeed it is the story; and it is most characteristically revealed here. Dowell's sense of double-ness, his not knowing himself or others, his process of discovery, which constantly plays a terrible darkness and silence just beyond the wry, bemused, plangent narrative, are at once the technique, the plot and the subject of *The Good Soldier*. This is Ford's most successful expression of his own personality and of his belief in Impressionism as a literary method.

Thomas Moser, sleuth, analyst and impressionistic critic, is convinced that Ford's psychology "matters", and he pursues "the life in the fiction" in order to establish at once the meaning of the work and the nature of the man. If Ford called his memoirs and autobiographies "novels" and they certainly fictionalized life) then his novels, Moser argues, can and should be read as autobiographies.

This highly coloured, highly speculative emotional graph of Ford's life is painstakingly applied to all the works. Ford's neuroathetic symptoms (agoraphobia, suicidal depression, anisocoria) are related to his techniques: persuasively so, since a fear of vast unfriendly spaces and a longing for oblivion do inform the narrative, too, with its impressionistic processes, not only of Ford but also of Conrad and Virginia Woolf. Every novel is mined for its Fordian neurotic hero, its Marwoodian English aristocrat, its forbidding father figure, its Conradian sceptical, foreign writer, its vengeful, dominant Elsie/Violet woman, and permutations of these figures. Ford's inconsistencies about dates in his novels, and his free handling of facts in his memoirs are cunningly traced to their psychological sources. Moser's thoroughness is daunting; no possible complexity escapes him. "If Ford, in 1924, makes the bad Conrad into Macmaster, he converts the good Conrad into what he has made of himself - Marwood." Here he proves that Mrs Caroline Marwood (as well as Violet Hunt) "is" Leonora Ashburnham:

Like Leonora with Dowell, she treated her husband as if he were an invalid. As Leonora takes over the management of Branshaw Tele-raph, so Caroline had the sole responsibility of running Water Farm. As Leonora rides about Hampshire in a dogcart, so is Caroline remembered, in a dogcart, in Kent. As Leonora, a couple of years after Edward's death, married her old admirer, the neighboring farmer Rodney Bayham, so Caroline, two years after Marwood's death and three years after *The Good Soldier*, was to marry their old farmer-friend and neighbor, Walter Picher - another of Ford's uncanny prophecies? Even more uncanny, Leonora Ashburnham Bayham becomes pregnant, and Caroline Marwood Picher adopted a child.

This way madness lies. To "prove" that a character "is" a person on the basis of what afterwards happens to that person is a bizarre undertaking, and it's not the only way in which Moser's compulsive commitment to source-hunting is disconcerting. One of the book's liabilities is that, necessarily, it relies heavily on Arthur Mizener's biography of 1971, though Moser often disagrees with Mizener's interpretations. Moser is sometimes obscure without the help of *The Saddest Story*. When Moser mentions "Ford's attempts in May 1909 to send Willa Cather to call on an outraged Conrad", we need Moser to explain that Conrad resented Ford's Americanizing of the *English Review* (Ford hoped to

persuade McClure, through Cather, to finance it). When Moser refers to Ford's "two brief, horrendous experiences close to the front" in 1916, we need Mizener for the full story of Ford's concussion, his damaged teeth, and his loss of memory. Perhaps this dependency does not matter - after all, Moser is not writing another biography - but it can be frustrating.

More disturbingly, Moser's idea of Ford leads to some distortion. It was typical of Ford, Moser says acutely, to "rearrange" or "eliminate" the "recalcitrant elements" of his life. The "psychobiographer" embarks on an analogous process. Not enough weight is given to the more public side of Ford - his political thinking, his editorial work. Less attention is paid to *The Fifth Queen* (not very rewarding as a *roman à clef*) than to the more revealing *Mr Apollo* or *The Simple Life*. *United Last Post* is written off ("Nicely Ford and Graham Greene are right that the novel is superfluous to the whole scheme") because Moser's thesis, that the passion of the Fordian hero must bring unappiness and death, is squally by Ford's attempt in the last book to have Tietjens come to terms with the modern world (surely not superfluous, but essential, even if flawed). Moser is slapdash too, with judgements to the footnotes awkward: why, for instance, is the confident denial of any homosexual element in the Conrad-Marwood-Ford triangle (a vital, and controversial, point) tucked away in a discreet note; why should Moser's fulsome praise of *Providence* ("a beautiful, engaging, noble, and timely book") not be asserted in the main text?

But two large objections, not just to this book but to all books of this kind, remain. No amount of "psychobiographical" analysis can say why, and in what way, a book is good or bad: as Moser says himself, to describe how Ford's personal problems "energize" *The Good Soldier* is one thing, but "explaining the greatness of the novel is another matter". To conclude that *The Good Soldier* is "overpoweringly Fordian" is merely to conspire with Ford's solipsism. The other objection is one which Moser does not seem to recognize, and that is the gap between the man, born Ford Hermann Hueffer, the writer, and the narrator - Dowell or anyone - of the books. Moser tries to close that gap, but, as Roland Barthes has it, "who speaks is not who writes, and who writes is not who is".

These are nagging criticisms, and it would be foolish to dismiss a book which, of its kind, is late-reinvented, inventive and comprehensive. Moser is illuminating on the Pre-Raphaelite and Connaughtian qualities of Ford's writings, his denied treatment of thwarted passion in *Parade's End* and of the doppelgänger theme in Ford's late fiction is interesting; he makes some of the unread fiction sound worth reading; and he has some marvellous material from Olive Garnett's diary, which describes Ford's painful relationship with herself and Elsie during his 1904 breakdown with Fordian poignancy: "It was a hot July. . . . We explored further . . . and went to Stoneinge, but he got worse . . . next day on the plain as we lay about in the tent, we all wept. It seemed so hopeless."

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cause, at the same time, she sees Dowell with Bagshawe, and knows that Dowell is about to find her out: "If it had been merely a matter of Edward's relations with the girl I dare say Florence would have faced it out."

It has to be said, too, that the dogged pursuit of Conrad, Marwood, Ford, Elsie, Violet, etc. through all of Ford's little-known works makes tedious reading. Speaking of the doppelgänger novel, *Henry for Hugh*, Moser refers to Henry's "exasperation" at having to remember the "incredibly complex genealogy and chronology" of the person he has "become". "So Ford must have felt", Moser comments, while he was writing "the Tietjens saga" in which he was "becoming Marwood" and so felt, at times, about Moser's attempt to "become" Ford. The book is inevitably repetitive, and its mannered, emotional, familiar tone is often irritating. "Unconsciously, Ford must have wanted it this way. . . . Once again the Fordian hero barely stutters along. . . . The real question is this: could an agoraphobic, neuroathetic, impressionistic solipsist - with, surely, a schizoid personality - write a great novel? It seems unlikely - except that Ford did it." I also found the relegation of large amounts of detective work and critical judgements to the footnotes awkward: why, for instance, is the confident denial of any homosexual element in the Conrad-Marwood-Ford triangle (a vital, and controversial, point) tucked away in a discreet note; why should Moser's fulsome praise of *Providence* ("a beautiful, engaging, noble, and timely book") not be asserted in the main text?

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Progress and pettiness

By Graham Petrie

FRANK MCCONNELL:

The Science Fiction of H. G. Wells
235pp. Oxford University Press.
£11.50 (paperback), £2.75.
0 19 502811 2

The vision of H. G. Wells as the apostle of a cross and mindless worship of science and technology, the indefatigably bouncy creator of soulless utopias run on vaguely fascist lines by an elite group of smug technocrats, is less popular today than it used to be, though fragments of it can still be found in the most unexpected places. Since the appearance of Bernard Bergson's invaluable *The Early H. G. Wells* in 1961, it has become difficult to ignore the often terrifying blackness and pessimism of works like *The Time Machine*, *The War of the Worlds*, and *The Island of Dr. Moreau*; while the title of Wells's last published book, *Mind at the End of Its Tether*, suggests the exact opposite of the breezy optimism so often attributed to him. The books produced in the long period of forty years between these two extremes, however, still pose problems, and the science fiction titles among them in particular have received relatively little critical attention (though almost all of them have been reprinted in paperback at one time or another over the last decade). A more sophisticated view of Wells, and probably the dominant one today, is to see him as the creator, at the very beginning of his career, of some half-dozen brilliant and seminal "scientific" romances, who then broke faith with his strident imagination to take on the role of self-appointed prophet, producing one-dimensional blueprints for a future that few readers could contemplate without dismay, or even abhorrence.

This position, though slightly fairer to Wells, still has many disadvantages. It presupposes an extremely sudden artistic collapse (from the widely admired *First Men in the Moon* in 1901 to the rarely read *The Food of the Gods* and *A Modern Utopia* in 1904 and 1905 respectively), and it fails to explain how Wells could nevertheless go on to produce a series of realistic novels (starting with *Love and Mr. Lewisham* in 1900), that display, to put it mildly, considerable fictional skills. Though

Frank McConnell's book, one of the first in a series intended to offer a criticism of science fiction that is "serious in its standards and its concern for literary value", has little to say about Wells's realistic fiction, it attempts to put a rather later date on his transformation from artist into prophet, and to see his science fiction writing as a whole as having greater intellectual and artistic coherence than has generally been attributed to it.

McConnell's claims for Wells, in fact, go considerably beyond the widespread acceptance of him as the greatest of science fiction writers, for he wishes us to see him, not only as a strong essential writer of our era, but a writer whose real time has not yet come, but is coming. "He is a writer with 'two voices': 'the scientific analysis of cosmic futurity, and the middle-class absurd but admirable insistence on the possibility of hope, the power of Will . . . [who] remained faithful, in his way, to both voices'."

The continuity in Wells's science fiction, then, develops out of the interplay between these two perspectives, with now one, now the other, achieving a temporary dominance, and neither ever completely victorious or completely absent. The early despair at man's misuse of his intellectual and scientific abilities gives way overall (but never exclusively) to the *willful* belief that, with energetic and thoughtful effort, the dream of human progress and improvement might yet be salvaged. Human perversity and pettiness are not easily eradicated, however, and they remain for Wells perpetual threats to the implementation of the highest ideals - as *The Food of the Gods* (that curious and neglected ancestor of Stapledon's *Odd John*, Van Vogt's *Slon* and so many other *Übermensch* stories) makes clear. Meanwhile McConnell attempts to rebut the charges that Wells's perfect society would be little more than a superficially benign totalitarianism by claiming that there is a genuine nobility of vision behind it and a subtle understanding of the nature of social and individual freedom. Moreover, he was always fully aware that he was creating *fiction* - utopias and that the "distracting (but perhaps truth-telling) lens of the fiction" was directed at the present as much as at the future.

McConnell's presentation of this aspect of Wells (which is much more complex than this summary can suggest) is convincing to the extent that it allows us to look at the critically neglected scientific romance of 1904, *1904* in a fresh and rewarding way and to find virtues in *The Food of the Gods*, *A Modern Utopia*, and in *The Days of the Comet* that the standard presentations of Wells overlook. Even McConnell, however, is forced to acknowledge that, for the Wells of the 1920s and later, "the role of social prophet did supervene over that of novelist, and particularly of scientific romance", and, though a continuity of vision may persist, the imaginative presentation of this suffers as a result. Only the little-known *Star Begotten*, Wells's last scientific romance, comes in for a kind word as "a graceful, immensely good-humoured, and oddly moving little parable," though some favourable attention is also paid to both the written and filmed versions of *The Shape of Things to Come*.

The main originality of McConnell's book is to be found in its treatment of the later, less familiar works and it is to be hoped that it might prompt a reappraisal of the value of at least some of them. The earlier chapters, which deal with Wells's life, his intellectual background (especially the debt to Darwinism which remained a guiding principle - to be argued with as well as accepted - throughout his career) and the better known romances, covers more heavily trodden ground, though McConnell is always lucid and intelligent and the book as a whole will be useful to the student audience for whom it, and the series it belongs to, is presumably intended.

Some day, however, someone will have to come to grips with Wells's fiction as a whole, avoiding the almost exclusive attention to either the scientific romances or the realistic novels that has been common with critics until now. Wells, who excelled in both types of fiction, is probably the ideal figure through whom the still controversial questions of the nature and literary value of science fiction as compared to mainstream fiction could be examined; and when McConnell, in a tantalizingly compressed discussion of *Tono-Bungay* refers to it as "a rich and intricate novel", which is "close to being Wells's best narrative performance", it is clear that only a more sustained investigation of the interplay between the various strands of Wells's fiction could fully justify the claims made for his greatness as a writer.

Out of battle

By Fleur Adcock

Selected Poems of Alun Lewis
Selected by Jeremy Hooker and Gwyno Lewis

122pp. Hentle Hempsstead.
Unwin Paperbacks, £2.50.
0 04 821048 X

The early 1940s were uneasy years for British poetry, with Apocalyptic rhetoric the dominant fashion, and the press demanding to know where the "War Poets" were. No new Wilfred Owen emerged, and the real poets went on writing as best they could about whatever subjects engaged them; but a number of them served in the armed forces, and a few were killed. One of these was Alun Lewis. His reputation has perhaps been overshadowed by that of his more noticeable contemporary Keith Douglas, but the best of his poems and short stories still read well, and his development during his short life suggests what a very good writer he could have become.

Lewis was born in 1915 in a mining village near Aberdare. He enlisted in 1940, was sent to India at the end of 1942 as a Lieutenant with the South Wales Borderers, and was killed in an accident in March 1944. All accounts present him as a most sympathetic personality, compassionate and unpretentious, liked and trusted by the pupils at the school where he taught and by his men in the army. As a poet he was not particularly precocious - much of his early work is awkward and derivative - but he applied himself seriously to improvement, and fought against the prevailing taint of romantic excess. "I've cut out nearly every rich adjective and high metaphor", he wrote in 1943.

At first his influences were Yeats (always a dangerous model for young poets) and Edward Thomas (often a good one). His first collection, *Raiders' Dawn*, published in 1942, was reprinted several times; no wonder, when one considers its combination of emotive subjects (war, weddings, air-raids, separated lovers), crowd-grabbing phrases ("Nightmare rides upon the headlines"), "And rose, within your velvet heart/Keep her, and me". But uneven though the book was, it included passages of pure, unexaggerated lyricism, and also more muted, thoughtful poems such as the deservedly anthologized "All day it has rained", which uses a quiet tone and precise details to con-

vey the frustration of men bored and dehumanized by life in an army camp with no action in prospect. (Lewis's military career never took him into battle.)

He used the word "indifferent" and its equivalents in several poems to signify the detachment which was at first imposed upon him by the unreality and unattractiveness of army life and which he later, in India, consciously sought: not a death-wish, as some critics have believed, but something less self-indulgent, both a hold on sanity and a movement towards identification with the Indian peasants whose hopeless lives moved him as deeply as had the sufferings of the unemployed miners' families in his own Welsh valley. Not that he

was unaware of death's attractions: "The dark is a beautiful singing sexless angel", he wrote in "Burma Casualty". . . . And Life is only a crude, pignosed churl/Frowns and starving, daring to suffer alone."

Lewis's progress towards poetic maturity was not uninterrupted - the latter work, too, has its lapses of tone or technique - but he often wrote under impossible conditions, and overall his development during his few productive years was striking. This selection is in chronological order, and it is fascinating to watch him shaking himself gradually free of dependence on cheap effects and increasing in strength, imagination and sureness of touch. India supplied him with colourful images, but his most

and formal organization that a memorable lyric requires, and although there is always a residue of genuine poetry in even her most diffuse pieces of lyricism her real gifts lie elsewhere, in a gift that inclines towards the novelistic. The best poems in *A House Under Old Sarum* are her narratives and dramatic monologues. Joan Barton's career as a bookseller seems to have brought her into contact with the kind of oddball characters who make natural subjects for narrative verse: characters like the compulsive self-educator in "A Passion for Knowledge in North Wiltshire" - "A man in a Swindon tradition - / Evening Institute and Working Men's college/ Had been made for him." - or the subject of "The Major - An Epitaph":

Ood with his hands, but nothing definite,
fixed up some tricky switches for the light,
built his own graceless desk and shelves
On the Parish Council; sidesman at the church . . .

The theme of possessions being transferred, lost, or desperately clung to, and attendant interests both in things antique and in the process of aging, are perhaps inevitable consequences of a life spent dealing in objects that outlive their owners. In "The Contents of the Mansion" a woman, the last of her line, catalogues her possessions, in a gusto-la keeping with her family's motto, "What I have, I hold":

A gentleman's library behind glazed doors,
Surtees and syntax, *The Sporting Magazine*,
volumes of pictured fish and brilliant birds,
and sets in tree-earl with the crest in gold . . .

The woman's tenaciousness is subtly undercut by her tragic awareness of its futility; her implied knowledge that what she catalogues will soon be prefaced not by her own "Quod habeo taceo" but by a poet's *Ubi Sunt*. Deft character sketches, a loving sense of what distinguishes one individual from another, and a style that is discursive but also thoroughly poised, are the qualities that mark the best of these poems. The single most striking poem, however, has none of these qualities, and is in fact quite unlike anything else in the book. "Whose Command?" is a stirring piece of social indictment, shows Joan Barton in a somewhat unexpected light: "Have you awakened comrades, to that morning round/Wakened with the taste of pain in the mouth to the clatter of enamel bowls, the gushing of taps/ Washed with awkward care, fearful of tearing the wound in your belly . . . ?" It is hard to believe that such spirited rhetoric could have come from the pen that wrote, for example, these stiff lines about a girl's school: "there may be one left whom I dare hope will want to read about our red-brick place/ (a humbler sort than Old Boys ever know)". The presence of "Whose Command?" in the book suggests that Joan Barton has reserves of vitality that remain untapped in even the best of the other poems.

In the Swindon tradition

James Lasdun

JOAN BARTON:

A House Under Old Sarum
New and Selected Poems
80pp. Cornwall: Harry Chambers/
Paterico Press, £3.
0 905291 32 8

Joan Barton began publishing poetry in the late 1920s, under the encouragement of Walter de la Mare. A desire to be lyrical, and a distinctly English habit of mind (wistful feeling for the countryside, an interest in English Institutions, and a quiet, very C of E religious conviction), seem to have drawn her naturally towards the non-European, non-Modernist English tradition of Hardy and de la Mare himself. Her early work is frequently reminiscent of those poets in substance, tone, and above all rhythm:

I shall not forget that place
Where the dead were:
Only the rain, the rain.
No-one said:
None with me when I found
The church in its fallow ground . . .

It is not difficult to see why Philip Larkin, who has always championed the Hardy-esque, included Joan Barton in *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse*.

What this new collection reveals, however, is that Joan Barton is at her best when she is at her least lyrical. She seldom attains the compactness of perception, suggestion

Nonconformity in Normandy

By R. J. Knecht

PHILIP BENEDET: Rouen during the Wars of Religion 279pp. Cambridge University Press. £24. U 521 22818 2

One of the central problems facing historians of the Reformation is where to ascribe responsibility for the political upheavals generated by that movement both nationally and locally. In recent years the process has been illuminated in respect of Germany. The response of various cities to the Reformation has been shown to depend on an infinitely variable admixture of factors - political, social and economic - not simply on the whim of a ruler; the importance of the role played by the whole urban community has been amply demonstrated. Until recently, however, no attempt has been made to apply the same kind of research to sixteenth-century France. Scholars have been content to treat the Wars of Religion there as a mere reflection of the tensions and conflicts within the court and aristocracy. Not even the *Annales* school has corrected this limited view: contempt for *l'histoire événementielle* has deflected it from such tasks. Yet, as Philip Benedict argues, "political events indicate cleavages and solidarities within a given society; they show what values were considered sufficiently important to be worth struggling for; and they reveal the social grievances which moved people to action".

For obvious documentary reasons urban history offers the best chance of illuminating the Wars of Religion by applying the methodology of the structuralists to the study of past events. Rouen, as the second city of France (France I even described it as the first on the ground that Paris was not a city but a province!) played an important role in the civil wars, sending more religious exiles to Geneva than any other French town. Unfortunately, its records for the sixteenth century, though plentiful, do not permit a precise statistical evaluation of the social composition of the Protestant community. Dr Benedict has had to rely on four principal lists of Huguenots for the period 1550-72 and on the membership rolls of the General Confraternity of the Holy Sacrament, a body dedicated to upholding the Catholic faith. His conclusions reveal how simplistic was Halverson's contention that "in Rouen in 1560 the working man's cause and the cause of the Reformation were one and the same". The Protestant congregation recruited its members from all social classes except the lowest: street-sweepers, such as the *corvées*, remained solidly Catholic. At the upper end of the social scale, office-holders tended to be Catholic as did the wealthiest merchants and members of trades concerned with food and drink. Otherwise all social groups were represented among the Protestants, though some proportionately more so than others. Luxury trades, for example, and occupations requiring a fair measure of literacy were particularly well represented. Oddly

enough, considering the important part played by aristocratic women in the French Reformation, there were relatively more men than women among the Rouen Protestants. Despite their minority status, the Protestants gained control of Rouen at the start of the first civil war, but they were soon ousted by the king's army and the Catholics restored in power. Yet the Protestant congregation survived, and after the peace of 1563 serious outbreaks of violence between the two religious groups developed, culminating in the massacre of St Barthelemy's Day. This has long been regarded by historians as a major turning-point in the course of the French Reformation, but its long-term impact has seldom been measured. Benedict's study shows that in Rouen, where the massacre occurred almost one month after the Parisian one, it precipitated a huge wave of defections. The Catholic parish registers reveal a flood of acts in which young Abrahams, Isaacs and Sras (names hitherto favoured by Protestants) mingling in age from one to twelve were "re-baptized". Other Huguenots flocked to the cathedral, where they submitted to formal abjuration. The massacre, in evidence of the Reformed congregation, from around 1,500 in 1565 it fell to between 1,300 and 3,000. What is more, this decline was permanent. Even after the Edict of Nantes the Protestant church in Rouen never regained its size of the mid-1560s. This was not the result of forcible conversions, but rather of despondency and disillusion.

Following the massacre, Rouen settled down to a quiet and prosperous existence until the crisis of the Holy League reawakened religious militancy. Benedict cannot throw much light on the means by which the League gained control of the city in 1588, but within the limits set by his evidence he demonstrates that the local *ligueurs* were not identical with the revolutionaries in Paris or Dijon. They were drawn almost exclusively from "the very highest strata of society", several of them being old-established *parlementaires*. The principal novelty of the revolution was the inclusion of four clerics among the twelve *ligueurs* chosen to administer the city. Thus the League in Rouen did not produce any radical transformation of the social complexion of the city's government. But it did signify a new conception of its authority: "in place of men whose power was legitimized by custom and precedent and derived ultimately from a king who in turn received his power from God, there now ruled men whose authority was sanctioned by the people and sanctified by commitment to a holy crusade".

One of the most interesting chapters in Benedict's important book is concerned with the spiritual upsurge that accompanied the League. As he rightly indicates, modern students of the League are usually more interested in those aspects which foreshadow later revolutions: its doctrine of popular sovereignty and its popular radicalism. But the movement cannot be completely understood without taking into account its impulse towards communal purification. In Rouen, this stood in marked contrast to the essentially negative attitude of the ecclesiastical authorities to the Protestant challenge during the first decades of the Religious Wars. Now, four important religious initiatives were taken: the *oratoire* was introduced, confraternities of Penitents established, a Jesuit college founded and an attempt made to bring in the Carmelites. At the same time there was much processional activity.

But were the sentiments of the bulk of the population reflected in this devotional activity? Benedict answers this question with the help of quantification. An examination of baptismal registers in two sets of parish records reveals that under the League sexual abstinence during Lent (which the church had long recommended) spread to the poorer parishes whereas, previously it had been observed only in the wealthier ones. This increase coincided also with a sharp increase in the amount of pious offerings deposited in the basins of parish churches. But this religious enthusiasm was short-lived as the war dragged on and as the economic crisis which it provoked deepened, support for the League steadily waned. By the time Henry of Navarre announced his conversion to Catholicism, the Rouennais, it seems, had lost their crusading zeal.

Holy Himalayan places

By John Crook

DAVID L. SNELLGROVE and TADEUSZ SKORUPSKI: The Cultural Heritage of Ladakh Volume 2: Zangskar and the Cave Temples of Ladakh. 166pp. Warminster: Aris and Phillips. £18. U 85668 148 2

With the international tourist season beginning again in Ladakh, and with Michel Peissel doubtless still gallivanting through the Himalayas in search of the last of the lost kingdoms of the mountains, it is a joy to have in one's hands a serious and scholarly treatment of the material culture of this remarkable region. Volume One of *The Cultural Heritage of Ladakh* (1977) covered the high valley area; the present volume examines the monastic and archaeological treasures of Zangskar, an exceptionally remote and mountain-locked valley with a long tradition of Tibetan Buddhism and a fascinating if obscure history. The book includes a brief account of small cave temples in Ladakh, and translations by Philip Denwood of important inscriptions at the old monastery of Aldir in central Ladakh. A biography of the important founder of several of the oldest monastic sites in Ladakh, Rin-chen bzang-po, is added together with the full Tibetan text. The book is fully illustrated.

When the Indian Government opened Ladakh to foreign visitors in 1974 David Snellgrove and Tadeusz Skorupski of the Tibetan Department of the School of Oriental and African Studies were quick to visit the area and scoop the story of its archaeology and monastic culture before it could fall into less professional hands. These books have the nature of an extended but necessarily

provisional survey. In 1976 Skorupski visited Zangskar and (together with James Crowden whose account of his over-wintering experiences and descent of the Zangskar gorge in 1976-77 awaits publication) became the first serious western visitor to the region for many years. Zangskar is famous in the Buddhist world because the great Naropa meditated in a cave there, and his disciple Marpa appears in local legends. Ladakhis of the Indus valley generally consider it a holy place. The first great western scholar of the Tibetan language, Csoma de Koros, was based there at Rumdum, Zangskar and Phuktal in the 1830s. The earliest archaeological descriptions were made by the Norwegian missionary A. H. Francke. Two small articles from the *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* (Vol. 10, 1906) describe his visit but are not listed in the bibliography of the present work.

Readers of Professor Snellgrove's masterly books on Himalayan Buddhism may however be disappointed with this one. The text lacks his earlier style perhaps because of its collaborative authorship, and could have done with editing to achieve a better balance and relationship between the topics treated. Skorupski's account of his fascinating journey to Zangskar in 1976, before the road went in, seems deliberately flat in tone, and compared with Volume One dries up the academic description often obscures the interest of a real-life adventure. The powerful atmosphere of many of these old monastic sites rarely comes across. Many of the site descriptions are mere catalogues of statues and paintings, giving little impression of their vivid impact. The quite extraordinary monastery of Phuktal, hanging from the lip of a vast cave among cliffs of a rocky gorge, gets only half a page and is illustrated by one poor photograph. Nor is it easy to relate the descrip-

tion of the Buddhist pantheon and its iconography to the illustrations in the text. Furthermore, the quality of the photographic printing leaves much to be desired.

Even so, the book's achievement is considerable and it must provide a basic text for anyone visiting the area with the intention of understanding what can be seen there. We have here in fact the first authoritative survey of some fourteen monasteries and temples containing treasures of the greatest interest. Several of the monasteries, notably Rumdum, Karsha and Phuktal, are sizeable establishments still recruiting their monks from local villages. They maintain the annual cycle of rituals and meditations characteristic of pre-1959 Tibet. Although, because they have broken off contact with the Lhasa of the old tradition, scholarship and philosophical understanding are now poor, steps are being taken to send some young monks to the newly established centres of Tibetan Buddhism in India. The quality of intellectual life in these old monasteries is thus likely to improve.

In Zangskar it is still possible to witness traditional Tibetan culture as it has been for many centuries - and it still takes a bold traveller to get there. Some of the monasteries are now poor, steps are being taken to send some young monks to the newly established centres of Tibetan Buddhism in India. The quality of intellectual life in these old monasteries is thus likely to improve.

The material culture of these sites is thus associated with a living tradition and forms an integral part of it. This book deals not with the products of a dead past but with the central symbolism of a people. It can therefore serve the valuable role of

introducing the modern traveller to an important living culture with significant messages for the world of today. A painstaking attempt to understand these monasteries is likely to be well repaid. The complexity of the iconography is considerable, however, and this volume provides a useful introduction, giving us not only a list of what is to be found and where but also at least the elements of an interpretive guide. For those interested in studies of a more social, religious or anthropological nature, such interpretation is also of major significance, for it can provide the key to understanding certain foundations of the Zangskar way of life.

Yet it must also be recognized that much of village life, including that of the monks themselves, is of a simplicity far removed from the towering edifices of the "great tradition" which the material culture on the monastery walls represents. The study of contemporary Zangskar is very much an attempt to comprehend the relationship between these two aspects of an ancient tradition. Snellgrove and Skorupski say little on the subject of villages but as guides to temple walls they are valuable commentators.

One especially valuable inclusion in this volume is the translation of the biography of Rin-chen bzang-po. Here is the authentic voice of a founding father. The monastery of Sumda, outside the main valley of Zangskar near central Ladakh, an ancient temple at Karsha and certain remains at Sani and Phuktal all date back to his time and are described here. The biography describes the life of this great translator, his journeys in India in search of teachings and scriptures, his work as a translator and his meetings with Naropa, the lama-king Ye-shé-od of Guge and the philosopher Atisha. The text is important historically and amply and carefully annotated.

The book ends with Philip Den-

wood's translations of the inscriptions on the walls of the monastic buildings at Aldir. Aldir, described in Volume One, is the best preserved of the earlier monasteries and contains much of great value to art historians. Denwood's translations read like a fine piece of detective work: the often fragmentary and obscure inscriptions give clues to the almost unknown history of Ladakh in ancient times. A systematic study of such inscriptions elsewhere, and also on the mani walls scattered widely over the region, would clearly be a most worthwhile project.

A land of monasteries such as Zangskar is a repository of many treasures, not only because of the creation of monastic decorations and statues but also because through the centuries monks have returned there after studies in central Tibet bringing books and other religious objects. Many monastery possessions are rarely on view. In 1980 the Dalai Lama visited Zangskar, and the monasteries put their valuable objects on show. At Phuktal fabulous tsangkas festooned the walls of shrine-rooms for several days, only to be quickly hidden again. Access to such objects is very difficult because of their religious character; although, sadly, in some locations in Ladakh personal scruple has occasionally been overcome by the high value of such "antiques" in Western Europe. Travelling scholars will eventually be allowed to see and study more of such objects; but for this a close familiarity with individual monasteries and personal friendships with individuals will have to be established. The day of quick and cursory research visits will soon be over, but in the meantime we can be grateful for the valuable insights which such journeys have yielded. Of this kind of contemporary study the present volume is an important example.

Bedrock in Brittany

By Robin Briggs

T. J. A. LE GOFF: Vannes and its Region: A Study of Town and Country in Eighteenth-Century France 445pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford 1980. Pp. 225. 0 19 822515 6

Like any good study of regional history under the Ancien Régime, T. J. A. Le Goff's book on Vannes in Brittany provokes reflection on the splendours and miseries of the aristocracy for the period. Immensely rich in some areas, mindbogglingly silent in others, they impose a series of *corvées* on the conscientious historian, while demanding great ingenuity if the results are not to be as arid as the dusty papers from which they derive. Many readers will find some sections of this book hard going, for all the skill and thoughtfulness with which they are presented; those without experience of such work will probably not recognize the extent to

which the author has reified and shaped his recalcitrant material. In dealing with such questions as population mobility, marriage and career structures, or changes in landholding, Professor Le Goff is careful to demonstrate the limitations, even contradictions, within his overall picture. He is writing about an area characterized above all by its static quality; in the Vannetais the eighteenth century saw only slight growth in either population or production, compared with many other regions of France. Even the Revolution failed to break the pattern, leaving behind it one of the most conservative regions of modern France. A deep analysis of the history of such regions clearly has an essential place in our understanding of French history; the lack of surface excitement may be compensated to some degree by the feeling of contact with the solid bedrock of rural society.

The economy and society of Vannes and the surrounding countryside were dominated by a group of structural elements, recognizable in varying forms across all of France. There were the structures of power:

law-courts, town councils, the bishopric and its officials, more occasionally provincial bodies such as the Estates or the *parlement* of Rennes, and their frequent opponents the royal *gouverneur* and *intendant*. Most of the small elite which dominated the region fitted somewhere into these organizations, if only in the form of noble membership of the Estates. In terms of land-holding the nobles were still predominant, despite a modest tendency for the bourgeoisie to buy up what little land came on the market. Much of the area operated the peculiar Breton system of land tenure known as *domaine congéable*. Le Goff argues convincingly that this averted the extreme polarization of peasant wealth found in many other regions, by maintaining a large number of middlemen. Neither landlords nor tenants broke out of the system, which gave all parties a certain security. The revolutionary legislators in Paris, committed to the maintenance of private property, resisted optimistic attempts to classify it as a feudal abuse,

and thus ensured its survival well into the nineteenth century.

The commercial economy of the region depended crucially on a surplus of grain for export; textiles (declining), shipbuilding (expanding) and fishing (static) were of negligible importance by comparison. The surplus extracted by the landlords and the Church were directed to other markets by the merchants of Vannes, shackled to this precarious trade by their failure to compete effectively against their more prosperous neighbours of Nantes and Lorient. The merchants were outweighed in town affairs by the large numbers of resident or semi-resident nobles, the officials and lawyers, and the clergy. The diocese seems to have been peopled by educated and serious priests, mostly local men, who enjoyed good relations with their flocks so long as they refrained from attacking entrenched local customs, or stepping outside their recognized role in the community.

In the course of a subtle and detailed investigation of the relationships between these and other factors Le Goff demonstrates that conflict and movement did exist beneath the apparently placid surface of Vannetais life. At a political level this was naturally concentrated in Vannes itself, where the monarchy's problems with Brittany as a whole helped to polarize town politics. The active members of the local bourgeoisie, increasingly frustrated by the intervention of nobles and clerics in town affairs out of selfish or external motives, were to form the basis of the "patriot" party at the outset of the Revolution. Le Goff inverts Augustin Cochin's interpretation of this respect, arguing convincingly that "1789 was the revenge of the politicians on the dilettantes". Even in Vannes, however, this "patriot" group was never more than an active minority; in the surrounding countryside the revolutionary government was soon to be the object of sullen and enduring hostility. Le Goff is rightly unconvinced by the contemporary explanation in terms of clerical influence, and emphasizes instead the ways in which the "reforms" after 1789 brought more disadvantages than benefits to both substantial peasants and poor.

seems again to have been the peculiarities of the *domaine congéable*, above all, which prevented the emergence of a strong group of small to middling land-holders with a vested interest in the new order. Any isolated rural radical must have expected a rough time, for, as the author shows, this was not a society in which one was wise to be too different.

Using the criminal records, he argues that the *bagne* had a far more intense social life than has sometimes been suggested, and one marked by a good deal of conflict and violence. In this relatively poor society tiny questions of economic advantage might start serious feuds, as might the insults with which people seem to have been so ready. Other quarrels were more obviously grave, such as those arising from competition for tanneries, while all were encouraged by an already impressive habit of rural drunkenness. In one of the classic regions of French alcoholism. This is one of the most compelling parts of the book, and one which would have welcomed more on the subject. For example, Professor Le Goff has little to say on informal mechanisms for settling disputes outside the courts.

In general, however, this sympathetic and scholarly book gives a remarkably full picture of life in this corner of Western France, and one which has a good deal to offer the more general historian.

The first issue of a new journal, *Parlements, Estates & Representation*, has appeared. Published twice yearly for the International Commission for the History of Representative and Parliamentary Institutions (subscription price £16 (US \$40)), it is edited by Dr John Register. The journal is concerned with political theory and the institutional practice of representation, as well as the internal organization and the social and political background to parliaments and assemblies of estates.

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The sway of the Golden Stool

By J. B. Donne

M. D. McLEOD: The Asante 192pp. British Museum Publications. £12.95. (paperback, £6.95) 0 7141 1546 9

About the year 1700, Okomfo Anokye, the priest, magician and adviser to Osei Tutu, King of Asante, gathered together a great assembly in the capital city of Kumasi. He then caused to descend from the heavens before their eyes, in a black cloud, amidst rumbles of thunder, through air thick with white dust, a Golden Stool - that is to say, a carved wooden stool covered with gold foil - which proceeded to alight gently on the King's knees. Anokye informed the crowd that this stool enshrined the soul of the Asante people, and he commanded the King and all the chiefs and queen mothers to offer up hairs from the head and pubes, together with nail parings. These were ground up and made into a paste, some of which was drunk as a magical medicine while the rest was smeared on the Golden Stool. Thus the chiefsdoms were united in one state, and Asante became for the next two hundred years the wealthiest and most powerful kingdom in West Africa after Benin (in modern Nigeria), until it was finally subjugated by the British and the King exiled to the Seychelles.

The more historians strive to sift out the true facts behind this story, the more the legendary and supernatural features become fixed in the popular mind. Certainly the Golden Stool exists, and on great occasions it is displayed in public, lying on its side on its own special chair or throne, to the shade of its own special umbrella. And it certainly brought unity to the Asante, which is the more surprising when one considers the disunity which pre-

valled among so many other societies in West Africa, the deadly rivalry of chiefdoms, the internecine warfare of village against neighbouring village, which in some areas persisted well into the present century.

It is this great kingdom, and its religion and court and art, that McLeod, who serves as an accompaniment to the current Asante exhibition at the Museum of Mankind, of which he is Keeper, "has been writing", says McLeod in his preface, "for the general reader and attempts to show something of the complexity of Asante society and culture. Inevitably certain areas of Asante life cannot be examined in such a work: it has not been possible to discuss the elaborate and beautiful music of the Asante, nor their songs and poetry. . . . Attention has been confined to material culture and especially to the items used in political display in the last century." Indeed, there is little that is original in the present work (for that one must seek out the many papers McLeod has published in out-of-the-way scholarly collections and journals). Furthermore, he has also had to omit any mention of the dance, an art form most highly regarded by the Asante and quite different from any European conception, as well as the fascinating talking-drum language, which demands a knowledge of non-Indo-European linguistics beyond the scope of most general readers. These limitations aside, *The Asante* is a most readable and informative introduction to Asante art and society, particularly during the last century.

It is based not only on the most recent printed sources but also on the author's intimate acquaintance with the land and its people gathered over many periods of fieldwork among them, and his empathy can be felt on page after page.

McLeod introduces his subject with accounts of the historical, material and environmental background. He rightly stresses the strong con-

tinuity in the African's mind between the fearsome, hostile and dangerous tropical forest teeming with wild beasts, invisible spirits and supernatural powers, and the areas cleared and controlled by man, their ordered towns and court organization, with their domesticated animals and cultivated farms. Only the hunter is at home in the forest, and back in civilization he tends to be an outsider, a loner. Perhaps something of this antithesis of safety and danger was felt in medieval and early Renaissance Europe, when so much of the land was still covered with dense forest. In Aldred's magnificent painting of "St George and the Dragon" we see a diminutive St George in a clearing in the oppressive, all-pervading forest, opposing single-handed this monstrous dragon of the woods. It might as well be an elephant in the distorted imagination of an African wood-carver, representing it as the spirit of the bush.

The succeeding chapters discuss various aspects of Asante art and material culture: goldwork, court regalia, stools and chairs, gold-weights (geometric and representational brass weights for weighing gold dust, much sought after by collectors today), brass vessels (*kuduo* and *forwa*), dress, pottery and wood-carving.

The power of Asante resided not only in its military strength but also in its deposits of gold, which was traded north to the Manding and thence across the Sahara to the Mediterranean, and south to the European trade fairs on the coast, which were variously held over the years by the leading European seapowers: Portuguese, Dutch, Brandenburg, English, French and Danish. The Asante themselves employed gold lavishly on court regalia (much of which was melted down annually and recast in new designs), as well as for personal adornment. These techniques were commonly practised by the goldsmiths: lost-wax casting, repoussé and the application

of gold foil. The latter misled some Europeans into believing that the Golden Stool was of solid gold: had this been the case it would probably have needed a crane to lift it!

Asante wood-carving varies considerably in both quality and purpose. Perhaps best known are the *akua nima* or so-called fertility dolls, with their flat discoid heads set at a slight angle on a long neck bearing a series of love rings reminiscent of the man in the Michelin tyre advertisements. A woman will tuck one into the back of her wrapper as she would carry a real baby, to induce fertility and to ensure that the unborn child will be blessed with the Asante marks of beauty. But occasionally these dolls are given to little girls to play with and to evoke their maternal instincts at a young age, or after a woman has reached menopause and they can be of no further use to her, they may be offered to a local shrine. I contend that they are always female, not only because of a desire to maintain the matrilineage, but also, as I have been told more than once, because a woman wants daughters since they are soon able to help her by sweeping the compound and fetching water from the stand-pump, whereas boys go off with their father to the farms. So a different interpretation should be sought for those figura carvings, which are obviously male, and which are often very crudely done.

Probably the finest wood-carving among the Museum of Mankind's holdings is the now famous executioner with outstretched arms holding the victim's head, formerly in the Cockin/Bardley collection (it is a pity that acquisition details are omitted throughout), illustrated on page 174. But even in this instance the sculptor appears not to have been familiar with the pose, or without the stand on which it has now been attached. The figure topples forward on account of the weight of the arms and their burden. Even finer carv-

ings, particularly of a seated Queen Mother (?) and child, are known, but these are mostly in American collections.

The cognoscens will be pleased to find that technical terms expressed in English usually have, added in brackets, their vernacular form in Twi, the language of the Asante. These terms have precise meanings which often come strangely to European ways of thought, and full explanations would be too lengthy and tedious for a book of this nature. Insistence on linguistic accuracy has led to the spelling of Asante itself, which may come as a surprise to some readers. In actual fact, many of the interpreters employed by the early Europeans on the coast were not themselves Asante but Ga from Accra, where not only the pronunciation but the language itself is different. T. E. Bowdich, who led the first official British mission to a king of Asante, adopted the local Ga version of the name and perpetuated it for the English thereafter in his highly informative account, published in 1819, entitled *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee*, and so until recently it has remained.

One serious error has unfortunately escaped proof-reading. We are told (p. 12) that "The ruler of Asante at the start of the seventeenth century" read "eighteenth" century. That this was merely a *typus calami* is shown by the statement elsewhere (p. 65) that Osei Tutu flourished between 1700 and 1710. But since Osei Tutu was the founder of the Asante Confederation it is important that this should be corrected in later editions.

But to end on a congratulatory note: the selection of early photographs of Asante scenes is fascinating and gives an immediacy to the historical background which words alone cannot provide. For once an author has done his own picture research and largely succeeded in integrating the illustrations with the text.

Boys' own

By Lindsay Duguid

T. H. WHITE:
The Maharajah and Other Stories
192pp. Macdonald. £6.95.
0 354 04070 5

T. H. White wrote the sixteen stories in *The Maharajah and Other Stories* when he was teaching at Stowe from 1932-35, and they are infused with a mixture of boyish enthusiasm and didactic purpose in much the same way as M. R. James's tales told to the scout camp when he was tutor at Eton. The predominant narrative voice is schoolmasterish and the stories, recounted with great relish, are full of the sort of things that might appeal to boys: feats of strength and courage, amazing details of the rare and strange, and instructions as to the correct way of doing things. Among the incidental pleasures are a description of the Maharajah's store-room, full of unpacked luxuries; the accommodation devised for the earl who believed himself to be a spaniel; and an authentic-sounding characterization of the smell of a wolf — "sour thread and stale bunnies".

Three of the tales are traditional ghost stories, told by countesses, professors and gentlemen round a good fire. In "The Troll" a lonely traveller, the narrator's father, spends the night at an inn in Lapland and spies through the keyhole a gigantic troll devouring a young woman in a nightdress. "Just as my father opened his mouth and the keyhole, the troll upended his mouth and bit off her head. Then, holding the neck between the bright blue lips, he sucked the bare meat dry. She shivered like a squeezed orange, and her heels kicked. The creature had a look of thoughtful ecstasy." In "Soft Voices at Passenheim" the narrator is forced to remain in his lonely fenland church all night, playing the organ to keep the music-loving spirits at bay. And in "The Point of Thirty Miles" a wolf which the hounds have been pursuing until twilight is transmogrified at the kill:

Currents of feeling

By Holly Eley

ROY A. K. HEATH:
One Generation
202pp. Alison and Busby. £6.50
(£2.50 paperback).
0 85031 3546

One Generation is the second volume of a Guyanese trilogy in which the men of the black Armstrong family endeavour to find contentment and at the same time to free themselves from the constraints of daily life. Constraints such as jobs, social standing, a familiar environment and, in their case, an obsessive dependency on women. Heath writes well when describing nineteen-year-old Rahma's post-Second World War Georgetown. Ostensibly, it is the same city in which, in the 1920s, Sonny Armstrong (who also featured in Heath's earlier novel, *The Heat of the Day*) contracted an unsatisfactory marriage and spent his nights as a minor civil servant and his mornings in waterfront brothels and Chinese opium dens. Rum and cake shops abound, only slightly more expensive since the arrival of American GIs. Berberie chairs are still formally arranged on the sun-rotted porches of once-elegant two-storeyed houses in Queenstown suburb; business interests and the bureaucracy still commute by ferry from villages with names redolent of a recent colonial past (Vreed-en-Hoer, Plaisance and Mocha) and the Americans remain a distant, barely acknowledged presence in the bush.

Roy A. K. Heath is at his sharpest when he examines the intense current of feeling which runs between the Armstrongs; the urges which are suppressed and misinterpreted but which surface, with interesting violence, in domestic jealousies and

"The werewolf's leg, gentlemen, that was cooked above the scummage, turned pink, grew hairless, convulsed itself like a kicking frog's, and Challenger was trotting round the outside with a hand of human fingers in his mouth."

Other stories here are imaginative reconstructions featuring famous figures; they are viewed close up rather than at a historical distance. In "Not Until Tomorrow" the future Edward II is seen as ten-year-old Dorian, treated contemptuously by his cousin Harry and hiding from Nanny in the garden. "A Link with Petulengro" describes the young Queen Victoria as "a determined little girl of femininity". And in "No Gratitudes" William Beckford snubs the simple trespasser who did not succumb to his seductive overtures.

These stories — and his other excursions into history "The Spaniel Earl" and "The Philistine Cursed David by His Gods" — demonstrate T. H. White's special vision of the past. This is not simply a matter of putting characters into costume and adding a few facts; nor is it a case of a shift in perspective such as Lytton Strachey went in for. It is rather a manifestation of a deeply-felt nostalgia for another (and better) age, a patriotism for another country, and it imbues the stories with life, feeling and the sense that the author has been there himself. (The schoolmasterish voice recalls Merle's in *The Once and Future King*, and he had been there himself.) White's discourses on social history are in an entirely naturalistic manner. In the early nineteenth century "Everybody talked about everything, and nearly everybody was ruined". Under Charles II, "Morris had become individual. . . . Buckhurst, Sedley and Ogilvy, at the window of the Cock Tavern, without a stitch of clothing, and blind-drunk, shouting at the populace". White's evocation of history is helped, also, by the authentic detail he uses and by his encouragement to the reader's imagination: we are asked to imagine what it must have been like to get up at 4.30 every morning and to compare Mr T of Kensington's successful

scenes. The resentful interdependence of Sonny and his children, Rohan and Genetha, is ended when in a drunken haze, the father falls from the porch to his death. Genetha finds solace in Christianity and in the embrace of Fingers, the nookier ace. Generous, unstable Rohan applies, apparently on impulse, to be transferred from his post in the capital to that of Chief Clerk in Suddie Commissary in the torpid Essequibo rice-field delta. His self-imposed exile is partly due to vague aspirations for adventure and change, and partly to a desire to distance himself from Genetha, for whom he feels both lust and exaggerated respect.

While still a trainee clerk in the Georgetown Commissary, Rohan had often visited Mr Mohammed, an East Indian colleague, and his household of beautiful daughters. He was attracted to Indrani, the eldest daughter, with her beauty and openness. Indrani is now living in Suddie and although she is married to a rich East Indian rice miller Rohan is unable to resist her. Her younger sister, Dada, arrives on the family visit and, infatuated with Rohan, moves in with him. In an isolated community in which everyone watches everyone else the ensuing scandal is enough to precipitate a horrifying, though not unexpected, climax.

In this evocation of a life still seemingly ordered by past colonialism, but in reality festering with racial tension, Heath never allows us to forget that Rohan is but one of many emotionally strong yet directionless young blacks in whose hands power will continue to rest. It is clear, too, that the economy is near to collapse and the industries, culturally fortified East Indians are preying for equality. Sensitive descriptions of exotic architecture, of crab-eating at picnics, and of care-

free if improbably hedonistic characters, are a measure of Heath's strength of observation and power of interpretation. But we are always aware as it would seem that Heath intends us to be, that Rohan Armstrong's Guyana will soon become the Guyana of Forbes Burnham and Cheddi Jagan, one of the few countries in the world with a falling population and, most recently, the notorious wasteland of the Reverend Jim Jones and his People's Temple.

A Salazar saga

By Peter Lewis

CHARLES GIDLEY:
The River Running By
500pp. Andre Deutsch. £6.95.
0 233 97333 8

The River Running By is an unusual and much better than average example of a type of fiction now almost always and condescendingly labelled "popular" — the family saga. Romantic stereotyping, soap-opera melodramas, and more recently the sex-and-violence syndrome have debased the form. Yet the fault is not in the genre itself but in what is often done with it. *The Rainbow*, after all, is an example of the kind; with Patrick White's *The Tree of Man*, Charles Gidley is no Lawrence or White, but he does avoid many of the pitfalls of the family romance and he handles both sex and violence with commendable restraint.

Much of the interest of *The River Running* By derives from the unfamiliar novelistic territory Gidley explores: the British community in Portugal. Considering the long historical connection between the two countries (dating from the fifteenth century) and the quasi-colonial British presence around Oporto, it is surprising that so little has been written about this outpost of Empire. Apart from Ann Bridge, and Kingsley Amis in *I Like It Here*, English novelists have ignored Portugal — where, incidentally, one of the fathers of the English novel, Fielding, lies buried in Lisbon. Gidley's novel traces the history of an Anglo-Portuguese family involved in the port business, the Teapes, through the entire Salazar era, from 1933 to the "revolution" of 1974, with some glimpses into the past to establish the rootedness of such families in the country and with a brief postscript to bring one part of the narrative up to the present.

In the early stages, the central figure is the heir of the family business, Bobby Teape, who seems destined for a highly successful career. His relationships with women, however, are less satisfactory, partly because of the indelible influence of his domineering mother. His engagement to the daughter of a similar family, Joy Remington, is broken off abruptly, and on the rebound he finds himself a wife in England, Ruth, herself on the rebound from the man she really loves, who reappears immediately before her death more than thirty years later. Running parallel with the account of Bobby is that of an illiterate Portuguese girl, Natalia, orphaned at the age of fourteen when the man she wrongly believes to be her father and who has made her pregnant is killed in a shipping accident. The contrast

between the two life-styles, expatriate colonial and local peasant, could hardly be more extreme. While the British live in affluence and comfort, Natalia struggles to survive. The two narratives first merge when Bobby, before his marriage, picks up and rapes Natalia, then offers her cash, regarding this as almost one of his patriotic rights. Subsequently, Ruth, who is Natalia's one of her servants, vanishes, much to Bobby's concern, not only because of his guilty conscience but because he suspects that he is the father of Natalia's son, Eduardo.

As the narrative unfolds chronologically against a background of social and political upheavals — Salazar's fascist "New State", the rise of Hitler, the Second World War, postwar changes in England, the demise of Portugal's African empire, the death of Salazar and the end of his long-lived totalitarian régime — certain characters occupy the foreground for a time, then give way to others. Some of the best parts of the book are those concentrating on the Teapes' only child, Stella, a natural rebel, sexually precocious and adventurous, and the ultimate badge of non-conformity — a sociology graduate from Leeds in the 1960s. Yet she cannot find an appropriate and fulfilling outlet for her energy, which she turns increasingly against herself. Her marriage to a circusmaster (if initially flamboyant) RAF officer is doomed, and under the influence of her lesbian Marxist friend, Phillida, she leaves him. Her subsequent liaison in Portugal with her former teenage admirer, Eduardo, brings her a period of genuine happiness, but the wilfully destructive power of the British community, in the form of her step-mother (Joy, the girl Bobby rejected in 1934 but marries after Ruth's death), finally drives her to suicide.

Throughout the novel, Gidley relates the lives of the many individuals he writes about to the wider context in which they are all enmeshed, including radical changes in the business world and the political turmoil of Portugal in 1973-74. Yet the network of family and personal relationships predominates, and not even the apparently liberated Stella can escape its clutches. There is a distinctly Portuguese form of fatalism running through the novel, from the curse and violent death with which it opens to the curse and violent death near the end. Eduardo, significantly, becomes a successful singer of *fado*, that singularly Portuguese form of folk-singing expressing *saudade* — a blend of melancholy and nostalgia in the face of a world controlled by destiny. It is this *fado*-like mood in the novel as a whole that saves it from being soap opera, close as it sometimes is to this. With its precise sense of period detail, *The River Running* By would make a good television serial.

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un doubted sources, missed by Upton and Warton, were noticed by Church and Koepfel, and summarised in the Variorum Spenser.

As a writer, Drummond was deeply influenced by Spenser. We might expect, therefore, that his annotations would show signs of a professional interest. And there are a few rhetorical comments, as well as keyword signposts to memorable and perhaps usable passages. At VI.ii.19.5-8 he notes "a shepherds life", at VI.ii.5.1-3 "a pleasant place". Opposite the stanzas that

follow the latter comment, Drummond notes the constituents of Spenser's *focus unicus*. Thus, at x.6.1 he puts "Mount Acidale", at 7.1 "a flood", at 12.1-2 "The Graces Daunce". And he has "smile" opposite 26.1-2, the developed comparison of the fourth Grace to "the daughter of the day" (Venus, probably, as C. Hamelton's note says). Drummond liked astronomical imagery. At 16.3-7 ("That jolly shepherd, which there piped, was Poore Colin Clout . . . Pye jolly shepherd, pye thou now apace/Unto thy love . . .") the comment "the Author so calleth himself" shows clear recognition of Spenser's presence in Colin.

Opposite VI.ii.40.3 ("Or wanton squirrels, in the woods farre sought") is a particularly laconic and teasing note: "Hard a". This looks very much as if it is a note on the line's not immediately easy scansion. The "a" referred to must be that in "farre", which hears what we might think of as secondary stress. Drummond would of course have little terminology and few concepts with which to distinguish between accent, pitch, quantity and length; far less to discuss departures from metre. Nevertheless, he received a good grounding in such prosody as was available, since he attended Edinburgh High School during the

restoration of Alexander Hume the phonetician and author of *Grammatica Nova*. Drummond's illustrative circumflex above the "a" in "hard" is to be interpreted in the light of standard theory and practice around 1600, according to which this accent might be used to indicate either a long quantity or a stressed syllable.

Quantity and stress were seldom clearly distinguished; and quantities were often described as for the most part fixed. Alexander Gill, however, could write of accent altering quantity: "Every syllable which has an acute or circumflex accent in long . . . also vowel in a final syllable followed by a single or double liquid is either lengthened or shortened under the influence of an accent. . . . The same thing will also be caused by an accent in rapid monosyllables, as . . . 3år [jår]." It is quite possible, therefore, that Drummond is noticing the length and stress of Spenser's "farre" — even, perhaps, appreciating it as a mimetic rhythm that conveys the extent of the search for the squirrel. The note is of considerable value as one of the very earliest comments of the kind in English to have survived.

Another group of notes consists of rather hazy signals of characters or places. So we are told "pastorella" at VI.ii.7.6, where the "faire damzell" first appears — although she is not named until two stanzas later. Similarly with "Mount Acidale" at VI.ii.6.1 (not named until 8.9) and the Graces (VI.ii.1.2, 15-1). Such annotations, of a sort familiar to anyone who has handled Renaissance books, strike one with the precision whereby they mark first occurrences, or delimit descriptions physically.

Drummond's notes on the Mutability Cantos may at first seem particularly routine. They list the actors in Mutability's masque: at vii.28.2 "The Spring", at 29.1 "Sommer", and so on through the seasons; and then the months, from 32.3 "March" to 43.1 "February". Similarly with "Day & Night", "Rowes", "Life & Death", "the Moore", "Mercurie, Venus, Sol", "Mars", "Saturne" and "Joue". Such marginalia were common in Drummond's time: indeed, very similar annotations of the Mutability Cantos — but anonymous and in Latin — occur in another Edinburgh copy of this edition (National Library of Scotland H.28.a.14). Drummond himself uses the Latin "Sol", instead of "sun" or Spenser's "Phoebus" (vii.51.8); perhaps revealing an astrological "set" in his approach to Spenser, as well as an interest in representations of what, with characteristic magniloquence,

Drummond's Copy of The Faerie Queene

By Alastair Fowler and Michael Leslie

In October 1977, Edinburgh University Library acquired at auction, with two other volumes, a copy of the first folio edition (1609) of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, which had once belonged to the poet William Drummond of Hawthornden (1585-1649). These volumes are now in the Drummond Collection, which was begun by the poet himself through gifts in the early seventeenth century and now consists of well over 700 volumes.

A great deal is known of Drummond both as reader and as book collector. His library, which comprises perhaps 1,600 volumes, contained other copies of Spenser — *Amoretti* and *Epithalamion*, *Fowre hymnes* and *The Shepherdes Calender* — together with more than sixty volumes of vernacular poetry, more than double that number of Latin and New-Latin poetry, and a considerable quantity of Renaissance literary criticism, much of it Italian.

All description of the newly purchased volumes has been given by M. C. T. Simpson, who also sketches what is known of his history after they left Drummond's possession. The copy of *The Faerie Queene* bears the arms of the Earl of Perth, in a state that probably indicates the second Earl. The outer motto, "DABIT TUTA PER UNDA VELA TIBI", which is close to Aeneid 5.796-7, alludes to the "three bars wavy" of the Earl's arms. As Mr Simpson points out, it may be the very "device", until now unknown, that provoked Drummond's treatise *A short Discourse upon Impresos*. In this, Drummond approves mottoes of two words "as gang warily", but not those mentioning any of the armorial charges explicitly. "For example, If there be the Figures of a Sea Waves, there be not in the word *Unda*, or *Sea-Wave*" — a similar argument, although not obviously so, to Jonson's in *Part of the Kings Entertainment* (1616). The copy was possibly given to the Earl of Perth by Drummond; and it was probably brought back to Hawthornden by the poet's descendant Sir Francis Walker Drummond (1781-1844), whose bookplate it bears.

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Black Blood

(University Library, March 1831.)

I am calm now that I am going to die,
As calm as sunshine. No more plunges
Over precipices, saved by a pine tree, while a carriage
Horse and driver bounced and disintegrated.
My blood is thinning, slowing, growing palid.
No more shotguns through the chapel window.
No more travels to escape my children.
Their assertive lives tearlog me like claws,
Like an owl sitting on my shoulder.
No more adventures, oo moon letters

Written in black blood: To my father —
'You have insulted me before my sons,
And I am a man of forty.' To my sister —
'Six to a bedroom, twenty-three to the house,
We have no room for you and your allegance.'

I am going to die like the light off the grass
When the sun shuts down; but more alone
Than Nature, hungry, struggling, oesdy Neturo,
Ever allows: trampled by children, wading
Through the oozy love my uncomplaining wife
Spreads on the floor, I am as lonely
As any wood, tensed under a gliding owl.
Or any old man outliving his descendants.
No-one has come, oelther my daody brother,
Nor my father bringing handfuls of contempt
To throw at me like money; ooly Mary,
The pious ooe, who weeps over Hell-fire, saying
'That I, that I alone, should be saved from this!'

Alfred avoids me. He walks in the long grass
As the sun withdraws, making up endless vases
On subjects of which he knows nothing: birth and death,
And love, and foreign adventures, and Timbuctoo,
And the white owl to the balcony, its to-who
Threatening our wits: Everythng upsets him.
He studied science, but oxygno and carbon
Were too usesttlog. Nothing comes easy
But scribble, scribble, in ink as black as blood.
Does he think his melodious word will keep him sane?
In his old age, watching the grass grow dark,
Feeling the black blood of the Tannysyos
Pound in his head, a no doubt devoted
Wife wrapplog blankets around him, hearing the owls
Warm their five wits in the bellies, will be believe
That the dark mud of vowels will fend off ghosts,
That I will lie quiet under the rotting grass?

Laurence Lerner

he elsewhere called "Time's purpled masquerade".

Such signposting marginalia are commonly dismissed as intrusive. But they provide vital evidence of reading methods. Here, they prove that Spenser's iconographical programme was followed closely and worked out in some detail. They lend support, therefore, to those who hold that without necessarily losing his readers Spenser could refine on an expected and familiar scheme — specifically, that he departed from the Ptolemaic order of the planets, closing the sequence with *Mars/Saturn/Jupiter* instead of *Mars/Jupiter/Saturn*, to express the interdependence of order and mutability. Similarly with the theory that the varied the zodiacal series by associating Jupiter's house Sagittarius with Chiron, who was Saturn's seed; and Saturn's Capricornus with the goat "where with Dun Jove was nourished". These interpretations have found their way into recent editions of the poem; but they are probably not yet uncontroversial. Some critical interest, therefore, attaches to the fact that Drummond traced the represented months in order and noticed the sequence of planets to be "Mars Saturn and Jove"; so that he was in a position to notice Spenser's subtleties. The former student of astronomy at Edinburgh University and owner of many advanced works on astronomy would hardly be ignorant of the Ptolemaic order of proximity of the planets. It can no longer be argued that Spenser's earliest readers would have been oblivious to such patterns.

Besides these verbal annotations, Drummond's copy contains another series of manuscript markings, in different ink or crayon. With one exception (II.vi.13.1-4), these occur in the second half of the poem; again reflecting perhaps the marginalia's relative unfamiliarity with Spenser's second and third instalments. In all, some eighty passages are marked. Some of the markings indicate *sententiae* or significant places in the narrative or allegory; but chiefly they draw attention to passages of special effectiveness or beauty, such as the *blazon* of the Captive Seren (VI.viii.42), or Scudamour's description of a garden at the Temple of Venus (IV.x.24). Spenser's rhetoric, iconographical imagery, and iconographical descriptions all receive attention. Of course these marks need not have been made by the same hand; but their concentration on literary skills suggests the interests of the fellow poet. It is not impossible that the symbols at IV.xi.20, 21 and 36 mark passages to be consulted from *Forth Feasting*: the passage on Scottish rivers ("Tweed which no

more our Kingdome shall divide") and exotic rivers.

While as my hills enjoy'd Thy royal Glenties
They did not envie *Tibers* laughing
Not wealthie *Tages* with his golden Ore,
Nor cleare *Hydaspes* which on
Pearles doth rore,
Empampred *Gange* that sees the
Sunne new borne . . .

Drummond's copy of *The Faerie Queene* contains tantalizingly few notes. But there are enough to give an idea of how well, in different circumstances, he might have edited the poem. One of the most well-read Scottish or English poets—better read than Jonson, for example, in French and Italian—he would have been well equipped to supply Spenser's European literary context. As it is, we are left to guess at the interpretations, for the most part, from the way he constructs his own imitations of Spenser: imitations found throughout his poetry, and marked everywhere by cultivated understanding. To these indirect but valuable insights, the marginalia add a few more direct glimpses.

We should like to thank Professor W. Beattie, Professor D. Abercrombie, Dr R. D. S. Jack and Mr M. Simpson for their generous help and valuable suggestions.

¹ His donation is described by L. W. Sharp in the *University of Edinburgh Journal*, volume 5 (1932-3), pp 125-32.

² See Robert H. MacDonald *The Library of Drummond of Hawthornden* (Edinburgh).

³ *University of Edinburgh Journal*, 5 (1939-40), pp 42-8.

⁴ *Torquato Tasso* (Cambridge, 1965), p 238.

⁵ *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, edited by J. Robertson (Oxford, 1973), pp 51-3.

⁶ *The Poetry of Edmund Spenser* (New York, 1963), p 291.

⁷ *MS. Memorials*; see MacDonald *The Library of Drummond*, pp 11-131.

⁸ See Derek Attridge *Well-Weighted Syllables: Elizabethan Verse in Classical Metres* (Cambridge, 1974), chapters four and five, especially pp 61-2; Alexander Hume *Grammatica Nova* (Edinburgh, 1612; facsimile reprint Menston, 1969). Book 1, chapter two, "De quantitate syllabarum", Hume advocated the marking of quantities as a standard orthographic procedure.

⁹ *Logonomia Anglica* (1619), chapter 26; translated and edited by B. Daniels and A. A. Gabrielson (Stockholm, 1972), p 177.

¹⁰ *Alastair Fowler Spenser and the Numbers of Time* (1964), pp 231f.; *Triumphal Poems* (Cambridge, 1970), p 60.

¹¹ Eg MacDonald *The Library of Drummond*, catalogue items 141, 173, 174, 177, 189.

Coming to conclusions

By Richard Brown

D. A. MILLER:
Narrative and Its Discontents
Problems of Closure in the Traditional Novel
300pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press, £12.60.
0 691 06459 8

Ordinary readers of novels have always had a strong awareness of endings. Some would rather block their ears than hear what happens at the end of a book they are about to read, while there are others who cannot resist a surreptitious glance at the final pages just to see. In recent years, though, the question of novel endings has also become a favourite with literary academics in that area of theory which has been called the poetics of the novel.

Ends have become more of an intellectual concern against the background of Jacques Derrida's neologistic and punning conception of writing as *différance* (both a differentiation and a deferral of ultimate meaning) and of Roland Barthes's emphasis on the characteristically heavy "closure" of the structured nineteenth-century "readerly" novel. In Barthes and in ensuing discussions, this "closure" at the end of the novel is seen not just as a termination but as an orientation of the sequence of events that has been narrated, as the last term in the semantic chain which gives significance to what has gone before.

The comparatively painless appropriation of this kind of discussion by Anglo-American critics owes much to the sanction of respectability offered to it some fifteen years ago by Frank Kermode in *The Sense of an Ending*. Kermode, most memorably, set fiction in the context of apocalyptic beliefs, arguing that we need fictional endings because of a conflict between the time of our own lives, which ends, and the time of the world, which goes on. His work, in part, depended on a sense of historical change and on unargued humanist assumptions about deep psychological needs; but it nevertheless offered an essentially formalist study of fictions, as types of order rather than as direct representations of the world. The most important thing about fictions was seen to be that they have ends: in their ending is the condition of their being.

Miller will have none of this. His approach is much more narrowly formalistic, enclosed in that strict structuralist Trappism which, in insisting on the separation of the linguistic system from its referent, makes it pretty near impossible to talk about history or the real world, and a novel's relation to them. He himself puts it in the preface: "The conflict that

Like all new debates, this one can be seen to have a long history. It was Aristotle, of course, who stressed that tragedies should have beginnings, middles and ends and described their complications and denouements as central structuring movements. But the extent to which "closure" has caught on in America now may be seen in books like Barbara Smith's *Poetic Closure* and Marina Torgovnick's *Closure in the Novel*, and in a recent special issue of the periodical *Nineteenth Century Fiction* devoted to "Narrative Endings". It may not be long before we have periodicals called *Narrative Endings* with special numbers devoted to the nineteenth century.

This new book by D. A. Miller clearly depends upon the existence of these recent discussions and is in many ways typical of a second generation of post-structuralist thought in America. Miller apparently feels little need to defend or justify his approach or make any elaborate exposition of his terms of reference. A footnote suffices to explain that "the word 'closure' will be used instead of 'ending' throughout this study" (suggesting that neither the terminology nor the concept are so problematic as one might think). The theoretical issues he presents are well-digested and his definitions correspondingly precise. He is also quite assured in his sense of the applicability of the distinctions he employs, strictly limiting himself to this one aspect of certain canonical literary works.

Although this rigour is welcome, it does mean that we have lost the enormously enlightening critical sweep of an early study like Kermode's. Certain European post-structuralists, moreover, would strongly object to Miller's approach. They would hold that post-structuralist theory constitutes a challenge to bourgeois consciousness and that it is not employable as just another kind of literary analysis. Even Kermode's hook, we may remember, gestures towards the political, making telling, if scattered, references to the Jewish experience in the Second World War.

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There are examples throughout the book of an irritatingly anachronistic determination to read everything in structuralist terms, as when Lydgate arrives in Middlemarch to find the old medical system there "a system of differences", or indeed when the work of Captain Wentworth are taken to exemplify a theory which he could not possibly have known. It is regretted, variously, that neither Valéry nor Henry James "went on" with their theorizing; they would, Miller implies, almost certainly have become structuralists.

But the prime objection to the book, which is well-argued in itself, must be against the rigid formalism of the terms it sets up. Though Miller has many insights into the psychology and logic of narrative, the question remains whether there is much value in distinctions so broad as to include (as he does at one point) Jane Austen and de Sade under the same umbrella. Similarly, Miller compares the temporary disappearance of narrative "closure" to the child's fascination with the disappearance and reappearance of his toys, his repetitive cries of "fort" (gone!) and "da" (here it is!) observed by Freud in *The Pleasure Principle*. (One presumes it was Lacan's striking appropriation of the idea in his elaboration of the role of language in the child's unconscious that prompted the use of this particular bit of Freud.) Few readers, though, will see much point in a comparison as general as this, the appeal of which seems to reside in having absorbed a difficult and paradoxical area of discussion as in any real contribution to our knowledge of narrative.

To look at Miller's summing up is to confirm these reservations: "To what advantage, we must finally ask, does such an opposition function in the novel? In the end it may only be that it functions to 'prove its own possibility'." This is a disturbingly weak and tautologous conclusion and one, with which we will be most unlikely to live happily ever after.

commentary

H.G. v G.K.C.

By Humphrey Carpenter

The Gallows In My Garden
BBC Radio

Saturday Night Theatre, for so long a repository of tired whodunnits, seems to be looking up a bit. Just over a month ago there was a striking radio adaptation of John Rae's novel *The Castard Boys*, and more recently 1 July 41 a sour little comedy by Bruce Stewart based on the ideological quarrel between H. G. Wells and Hilaire Belloc, one of the more entertaining literary squabbles of the 1920s.

Wells revises his *Outline of History*, revised and in serial form, his second wife Jane patiently typing out page after page of it while Wells nips across the Channel to amuse himself with a series of mistresses at his French house. Belloc, a foe of the first edition of the *Outline*, greets its reappearance with a series of articles of his own, eventually reducing Wells to testful collapse just as he

learns that Jane is dying of cancer. G. K. Chesterton thinks that Belloc has gone a bit far, even in the cause of Catholicism and truth, but then discovers that what appeared to be signs of repentance in Wells are merely indications that the scoundrel has got a new mistress. George Bernard Shaw hangs about on the sidelines, finding the whole thing richly comic.

It could, perhaps, have been a good play, but caricature quickly took over. Shaw sounded like an Irish barman and Freddie Jones's Chesterton was a boozy Winnie-the-Pooh: "Have another pint, G.K.C." (Sounds of ale being downed.) "Ha! 'would be folly to refuse, Hilary.' The constant use of initials produced an effect of self-parody." "G.K.C. Good gracious!" "My dear Jane, I've come to see H.G." Ronald Lacey as Wells was on a higher plane than this, and managed to get across a good deal of intellectual and sexual anguish; his accent and rather sloppy style of speech were, one imagines, just what Wells spoke like, but the script gave him little chance. Were we supposed to sympathize with Wells's predicament, or to side with

the Catholic mafia, or merely to laugh at the whole thing like Shaw? Was Wells supposed to seem tragic or merely silly?

Worst of all, Mr Stewart's play gave only the most superficial indications of what the whole quarrel was about. Both the *Outline* and Belloc's outraged protests were made to seem more noisy rhetoric, and any real exposition of the conflict was abandoned in favour of dialogue that consisted chiefly of gobblets from the writings of the principal characters. Chesterton and Shaw reeling "Lepanto" antiphotically as a commentary on the mastering of Catholic forces against Wells was bearable, but most of the time the effect was less subtle. Travelling in a taxi that lures itself north of Regent's Park, Shaw remarks: "Why, my dear Chesterton, it's like that poem of yours — 'The night we went to Birmingham by way of . . . Where was it, now?'"

Still, *The Gallows In My Garden* (the title comes from a Chesterton poem which refers to the rumour) was far better than the run-of-the-mill Saturday night thriller, irritating only in that the chance of something better still was thrown away.

Galley slaves

By Patricia Craig

Room
Royal Court Theatre Upstairs

"All I could do was to offer you an opinion upon one minor point — a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." Virginia Woolf's celebrated pronouncement is the starting-point for an interesting experiment in political theatre. *Room*, devised by Natasha Morgan (who also takes the leading role), opens in naturalistic style with a young wife setting out her domestic grievances in a letter addressed to her thoughtless husband. Quickly, however, the emblematic and expository take over. The lights are dimmed, and a female voice is heard lecturing on Aphra Behn. The wife reappears in the uniform of a housemaid.

Like the Woolf essay, *Room* progresses in a roundabout, discursive, gently mocking way, with pieces of social satire, historical by-play, and symbolic action (galley proofs suddenly sprout from the floor like an army of dragons' teeth; the over-

wrought wife dashes off at a moment of domestic discord to shoot the baby, raising a nervous laugh from the audience) thrown in to underline the central proposition. To avoid infringement of copyright held by the Woolf estate, the author of *Room* was obliged to make certain changes in her material; so, instead of Virginia Woolf herself, we have an imaginary novelist called Lillian Raine. To quote Woolf's remark on another subject, "a very queer, composite being thus emerges". It's a dummy figure for part of the time; it behaves badly at the dinner table, being highly strung; and its bad behaviour in the subject of a later discussion between two outraged guests ("cavilar and coleslaw all over the place"). The noise of parties — those pre-war Cambridge luncheon parties where the talk went on "swimmingly . . . agreeably, freely, amusingly" — is constantly in the background.

The technique of parody, whimsy, shifting viewpoints, anecdote and outspokenness are all used to good effect; but sometimes the method is nearly as elusive as it's allusive. The figure in the white Victorian petticoat and bee-keepers' headgear, for instance, is Emily Dickinson, Sylvia Plath, or a combination of the two? Or the blind fury

with th' abhorred shears? (Whatever its implication, the visual effect is striking.) The function of the single male actor (Nigel Hughes) is to embody, in various ways, unthinking prejudice: at one moment he is Oscar Browning, declaring that "the best woman [is] intellectually the inferior of the worst man"; at another he is the average blunt critic who finds something to upset him in the rhythm of Virginia Woolf's (Lillian Raine's) prose: "What is she waffling on about? Why doesn't she get to the point?" He is also the husband in the contemporary set piece who is responsible for the put-upon, crowded condition of his wife and the consequent sorry waste of her talent ("language that is not current becomes defunct"). In order to write this letter to you," the heroine states with some relish, "I have had to leave your daughter crying in the garden for two hours — and it is snowing."

Natasha Morgan puts on an adept performance (well supported by Jenny Carey and Helen Cooper, as well as Nigel Hughes); her inventiveness and acuity are impressive. As an attempt to render social forces in dramatic terms, though, *Room* suffers a little from the lack of a strong narrative line.

Sweated out

By Nicholas Shakespeare

Steamlog
Theatre Royal, Stratford E.15

It says much for Nell Dunn's powers as the writer of *Poor Cow* and *Up the Junction* that the characters in her first stage play at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, are strong enough to support a play in which little happens.

The setting of *Steamlog* is an East End Turkish bath which becomes a regular watering-hole for five women. As Violet, the benign attendant puts it, "Steam's a good place for crying . . . it gets all the acids and poison out", and the lives of her clientele are empty enough for them to spend the whole time baring themselves and their fantasies in Jenny Tiramani's cold and shabbily Roman set.

The play is flannelled out by their shared confidences. Made in cued monologues rather than in conversa-

tion, these become mockingbird repetitions about domestic tedium, economic hardship and the tyranny of men. At times one can sympathize with the husbands who have deserted them and with the local Council's decision, made rather late in the play, to close down the bath and build a library in its place. Nell Dunn perhaps misses a dramatic chance in not allowing us to see any of these men — except the caretaker through a frosted window — and the play only unwraps with a campaign to save the bath an ensuing sit-in and the final moment when, at last, the plunge.

For all its structural flaws, *Steamlog* is a very funny and affectionate play. Josie, a tempestuous and pleasure-seeking cockney, is brought fiercely to life by Georgina Hale, fighting for what she wants as well as against the men who provide it. Her growing intimacy with Nancy, a "rigid divorcee" who is prevented by middle-class stigmas from similarly enjoying herself, is acutely presented. So too is the coming out of Mrs Meadows's repressed and deranged daughter, Dawn. Brenda

Blethyn's performance is never over-played. Her naked appearance at the end, after two hours in plastic wrap, is so effective a tour de force that it makes one wonder if Roger Smith could have made a more discriminate use of nudity in his production. In revealing everything so early on, Patti Love's portrayal of a painfully typecast hippy is especially fleeced of interest.

"When old men are very lecherous, their heads and jaws are so unpleasant," Virginia Woolf wrote when tea with a retired civil servant had taken an unexpected turn. The letter is one of a wealth of literary and historical manuscripts being sold at Sotheby's on July 20 and 21. There are poetic manuscripts by Shakespeare plays marked by Sir Henry Irving, and scores of other materials. Among the modern items are designs, blue-prints, photographs and reports about living in space, the work of Raymond Loewy, NASA's "habitability consultant".

LIBRARIANS

The Librarian

The post of University Librarian will become vacant on 1 April 1982 upon the retirement of Mr R. F. Eatwell.

The University Council intends to proceed to appoint a successor during 1981, and invites applications from graduates with professional qualifications and considerable experience. The appointment will be on Grade IV of the national salary structure for Senior Librarian Staff.

Copies of the Further Particulars for this appointment may be obtained from the University Secretary (J.A.), University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey GU2 5XH, or by telephone, Guildford 71281, Ext. 816. Applications in the form of a curriculum vitae, together with the names and addresses of three referees, should be sent to the same address by the 7th September 1981 quoting reference 42 TLS.

UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

WARRINGTON
CHILCHESTER HIGH SCHOOL
SCHOOL LIBRARIAN
Required full-time. Culcieth High School, Warrington Avenue, Culcieth, Warrington, Cheshire WA1 4JH. The post is vacant on 1 September 1981. The successful candidate should be a qualified Librarian with a minimum of 5 years' experience in a secondary school. The salary is £5,200 - £7,100 per annum (inclusive of London Allowance). Applications should be sent to the Librarian, Chilchester High School, Warrington, Cheshire WA1 4JH. Closing date 24th July 1981.

LONDON
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON
INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
LIBRARY ASSISTANT
The Library of the Institute of Education has a vacancy for a Library Assistant (Grade II) to assist the Librarian. The successful candidate will be responsible for the day-to-day running of the library, including the receipt and processing of books, journals, and other materials. The salary is £4,500 - £5,500 per annum (inclusive of London Allowance). Applications should be sent to the Librarian, Institute of Education, 21, Wimpole Street, London W1P 8LP. Closing date 24th July 1981.

LONDON
THAMES POLYTECHNIC
ASSISTANT LIBRARIAN
TECHNICAL DEPARTMENT
Applications are invited from qualified Librarians for the post of Assistant Librarian in the Technical Department. The successful candidate will be responsible for the day-to-day running of the library, including the receipt and processing of books, journals, and other materials. The salary is £4,500 - £5,500 per annum (inclusive of London Allowance). Applications should be sent to the Librarian, Thames Polytechnic, 100, Roper Street, London E1 6JH. Closing date 24th July 1981.

SOMERSET
COUNTY COUNCIL
LIBRARY SERVICES
LIBRARIAN BASED AT BRIDGWATER
AP. 66037-66051 (Salary award pending)
A Chartered Librarian is required for the post of Librarian at the County Council Library, Bridgwater. The successful candidate will be responsible for the day-to-day running of the library, including the receipt and processing of books, journals, and other materials. The salary is £4,500 - £5,500 per annum (inclusive of London Allowance). Applications should be sent to the Librarian, Somerset County Council, Bridgwater, Somerset, TA6 1JH. Closing date 24th July 1981.

LONDON
LIBRARIAN GRADE III UPPER
The Central Library for Urban and Education has a vacancy for a Librarian (Grade III Upper). The successful candidate will be responsible for the day-to-day running of the library, including the receipt and processing of books, journals, and other materials. The salary is £4,500 - £5,500 per annum (inclusive of London Allowance). Applications should be sent to the Librarian, Central Library for Urban and Education, 100, Roper Street, London E1 6JH. Closing date 24th July 1981.

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Red rosebuds and coal-black mud

By Roy Palmer

ROGER DE V. RENWICK:
English Folk Poetry
Structure and Meaning
270pp. Batsford, £12.50.
0 7134 3681 6

Roger De V. Renwick tells us that he is writing specifically for "collectors, analysts, and lovers of folk poetry", and that his primary goal is "to discover implicit meanings in texts". Rather more than half the book is concerned with traditional songs which circulated orally. A detailed study of "The Bold Fisherman" concludes that, whatever its possible connection with Gnosticism, the song, with its theme of a lover unrecognized on his return, is very close to many other pieces dealing with love.

In a chapter on songs of sexual liaison (152 of them to be precise), Renwick establishes three categories, which are then further sub-divided: the symbolic (such as "The Seeds of Love", with its flower code of red rosebuds for passion, and the like), the euphemistic ("O you've won my heart, but ever, Jack / Your master's a man for me / For he can't come with his rap-tap-tap / Not half so well as I"),

and the metaphorical (in which hares are pursued over mountains, meadows mown or not, and card games won or lost, as extended sexual metaphors). The three categories coincide, says Renwick, respectively with "being", "becoming", and "behaving", the second apparently being "more fitted to an industrial era". This seems somewhat fanciful, especially if one looks at songs of the Industrial Revolution which deliberately exploit new opportunities for sexual imagery. Steam-looms and threshing-machines fall into the metaphorical mode, not the euphemistic.

Perhaps the best part of the book deals with the traditional and popular verse of Yorkshire, which no doubt reflects folk work done there by Renwick. Folk song was a national phenomenon which also interacted with particular localities. A song circulating nationally would have local variations; however a local song might achieve nationwide currency, sometimes with changes, sometimes not. One needs therefore to be careful when designating a song as local, and some of Renwick's examples are a good deal less local than he thinks. "On Leeds becoming a sea-port town" was widely circulated with the name changed to "Manchester" or "Birmingham", or even left blank so that a singer could insert whatever location he wished. "The Wensleydale Lad" shows the innocent abroad in Leeds, with its factories ("Owd Ned turn'd

iv'ry wheel, an' iv'ry wheel a strap / Begor, 'sald I to m' m'aster-man, 'Owd Ned's a rare strong chap"). And its church. Yet the section on "Leeds Old Church" was originally written about Manchester Old Church; the song was printed under various titles on broadsides as far afield as London; and it is still current, not only in Yorkshire, but also in Lancashire.

Renwick goes on to discuss what is indisputably local verse, written by identifiable people such as Mrs Martha Bairstow. These writings, it seems to me, have their origin in popular verse-forms such as the epitaph and weather-rhymes. They derive principally, however, from the jog-trot music-hall monologues of the nineteenth century. These are usually either jocular or sentimental, as can be seen from the work of a well-known current practitioner, Mike Harding. They seldom achieve either the depth or force of traditional poetry.

Mrs Bairstow is an ordinary person who writes popular verse, but this does not automatically make her work folk poetry, for this is a form with its own discipline. The point does not seem to have been taken by Renwick, though it is hinted at in his final chapter, which is an interesting analysis of reactions by local working-class poets to the Lofthouse Colliery disaster of 1973. Of the poems treated, one is immediately recognizable, with its irregular metre and its efforts to speak with an individual voice, as an attempt at poetry

about court. The others are all popular verse of different kinds — hymn, song, march, memorial — yet only some are akin to traditional utterance, and one is directly fashioned on a traditional model. "Six days we pumped to get them out / An' n'r pocket might have saved them / The news we drended came at last / The pocket it was empty / Not one had reached the precious air / And in coal-black mud now they lay / No more their families' lives to share / No more see the light of day". Even this, so far as I know, failed the ultimate test of folk poetry, that of achieving oral transmission and veneration, independently of its first beguiler.

In his analysis Renwick makes use of the terminology, not only of folklore, but of cultural anthropology and social history. He also draws upon "phenomenological approaches to culture, studies in communication, and general systems theory". This unfortunately leads to obfuscating jargon and downright bad writing. Speaking of the Lofthouse poems, for example, we hear that they "constitute one set whose members share in general a negative feedback model of Self/Other relationships". Still, though the style is irritating, and though Renwick's interpretations are rarely new, his readings are certainly worth reading, and his aim of bringing contemporary working-class poetry into folklorists' purview will undoubtedly have been furthered by this stimulating book.